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2099 UNLIMITED
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THE PREMIERE OF
HULK 2099
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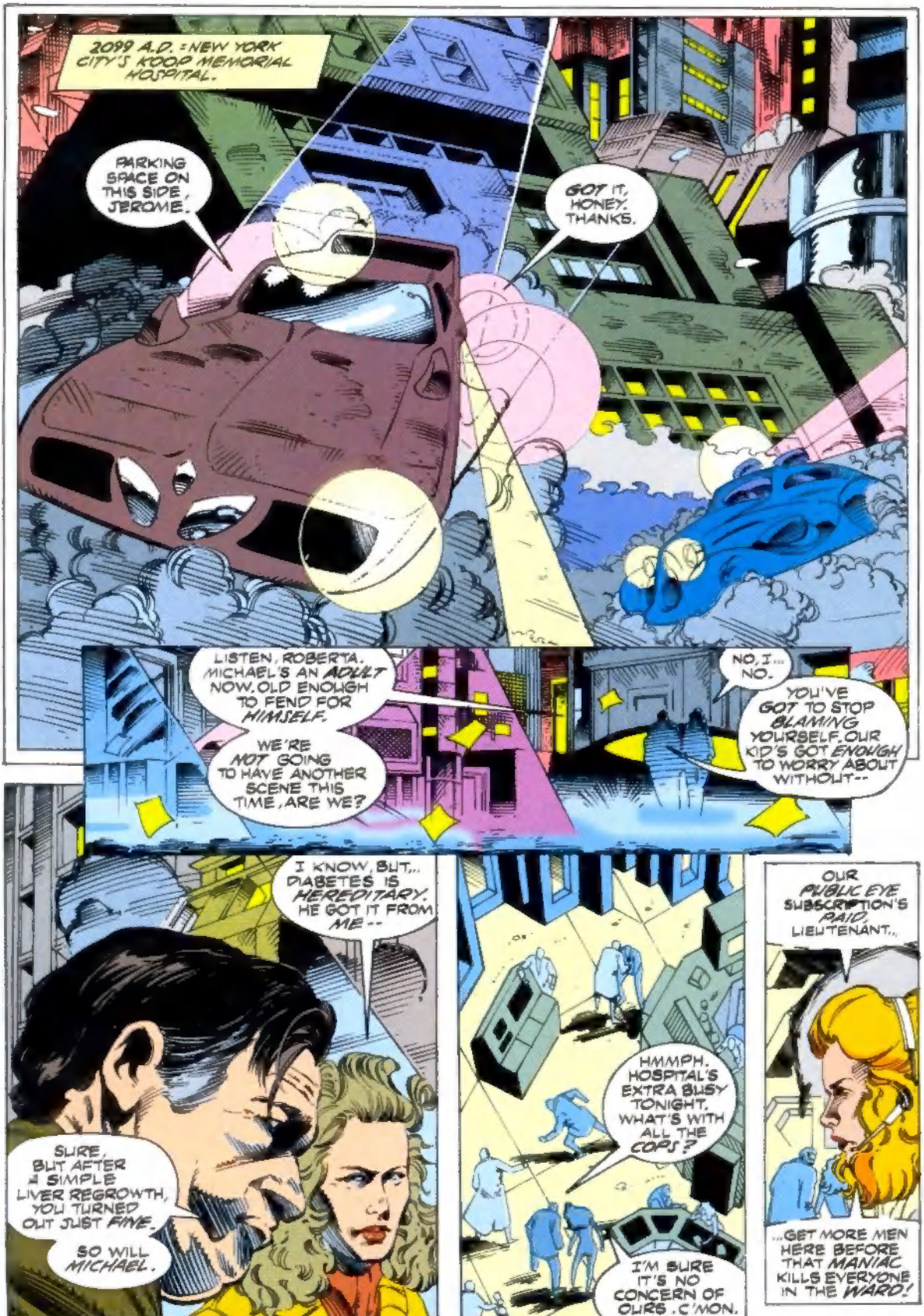
2099 A.D. = NEW YORK CITY'S KOOP MEMORIAL HOSPITAL.
PARKING SPACE ON THIS SIDE, JEROME.
GOT IT, HONEY. THANKS.
LISTEN, ROBERTA. MICHAEL'S AN ADULT NOW. OLD ENOUGH TO FEND FOR HIMSELF.
WE'RE NOT GOING TO HAVE ANOTHER SCENE THIS TIME, ARE WE?
NO, I... NO.
YOU'VE GOT TO STOP BLAMING YOURSELF. OUR KID'S GOT ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT WITHOUT--
I KNOW, BUT... DIABETES IS HEREDITARY. HE GOT IT FROM ME--
SURE, BUT AFTER A SIMPLE LIVER REGROWTH, YOU TURNED OUT JUST FINE.
SO WILL MICHAEL.
HMMPH. HOSPITAL'S EXTRA BUSY TONIGHT. WHAT'S WITH ALL THE COPS?
I'M SURE IT'S NO CONCERN OF OURS. C'MON.
OUR PUBLIC EYE SUBSCRIPTION'S PAID, LIEUTENANT...
...GET MORE MEN HERE BEFORE THAT MANIAC KILLS EVERYONE IN THE WARD!

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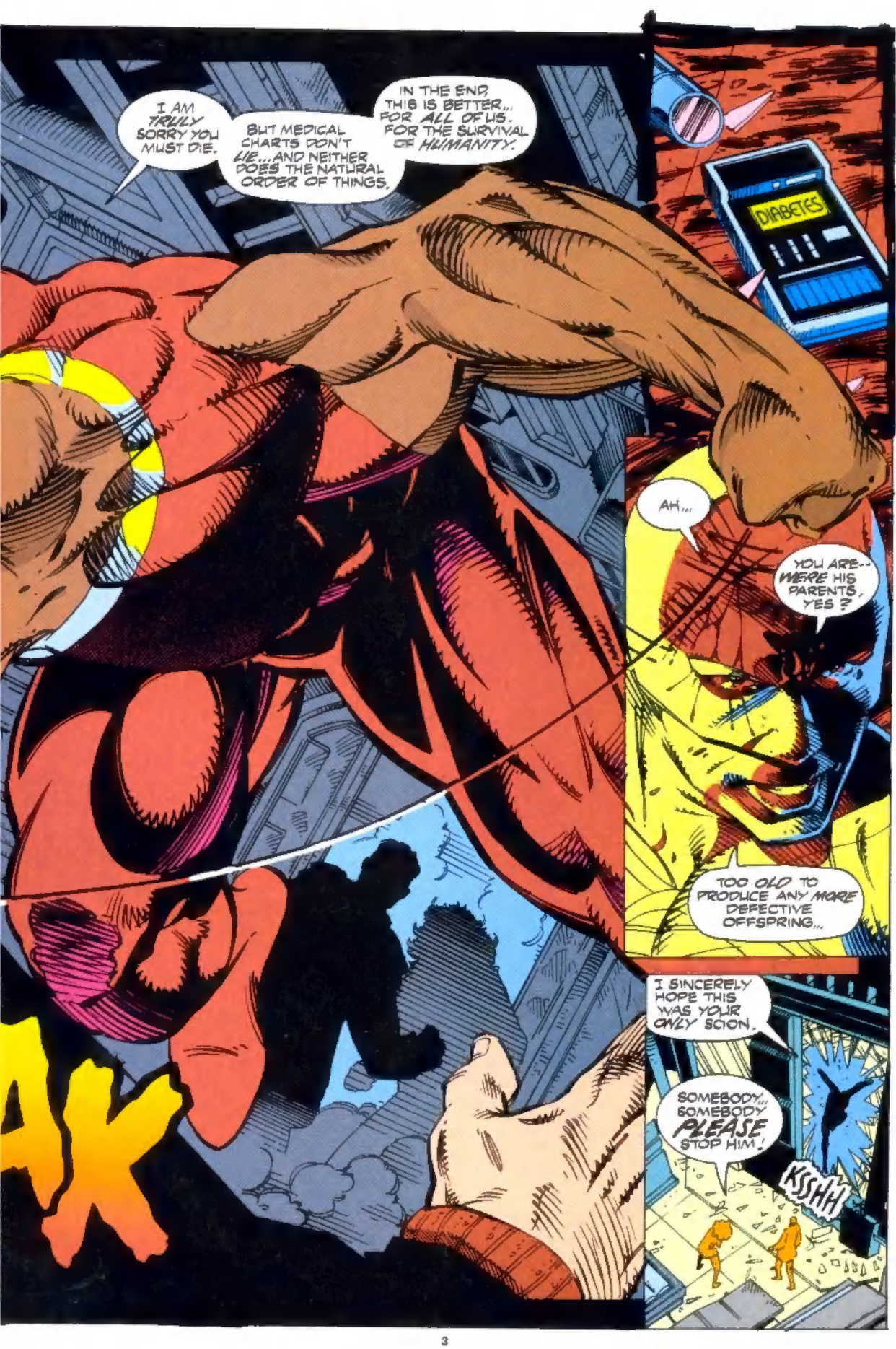
OUR FLOOR, HON--
WHA--
WHAT'S HAPPENED HERE?!
MICHAEL!
OUR SON! IS HE?
NO!
KR


I AM TRULY SORRY YOU MUST DIE.
BUT MEDICAL CHARTS DON'T LIE... AND NEITHER DOES THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS.
IN THE END, THIS IS BETTER... FOR ALL OF US. FOR THE SURVIVAL OF HUMANITY.
DIABETES
AH...
YOU ARE-- WERE HIS PARENTS, YES?
TOO OLD TO PRODUCE ANY MORE DEFECTIVE OFFSPRING...
I SINCERELY HOPE THIS WAS YOUR ONLY SCION.
SOMEBODY... SOMEBODY PLEASE STOP HIM!
KSSHH
AK

OUR FLOOR, HON--

22

WHA--

WHAT'S HAPPENED HERE?!

MICHAEL!

OUR SON! IS HE?

NO!

KRAK

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YOU ARE--WERE HIS PARENTS, YES?

TOO OLD TO PRODUCE ANY MORE DEFECTIVE OFFSPRING...

I SINCERELY HOPE THIS WAS YOUR ONLY SCION.

SOMEBODY... SOMEBODY PLEASE STOP HIM!

KSSHH

STAN LEE PRESENTS:
NOTHING EVER CHANGES!!
WEEKS LATER...
SPIDER-MAN!
EVAN SKOLNICK . CHRIS WOZNIAK . CHRIS IVY
WRITER PENCILER INKER
STEVE DUTRO . MARIE SEVERIN
LETTERER COLORIST
JOEY CAVALIERI . TOM DEFALCO
EDITOR GENETICALLY PERFECT
DO NOT MOVE! YOU ARE ALL UNDER ARREST!
WISH THE PUBLIC EYE WERE AS GRATEFUL AS THIS POOR GUY WHO ALMOST GOT HIS IDENTIFIER BIOIMPLANT RIPPED OUT!
TAKE TIME OUT FROM YOUR BUSY WORK MORNING TO PLAY GOOD SAMARITAN...
PWEE
...AND THIS IS THE THANKS I GET!
PWEE
PWEE
PWEE

AAH, WHY DO I BOTHER?
I DON'T GET ANY MORE RESPECT AS SPIDER-MAN THAN I DO HERE AT ALCHEMAX.
IF THEY EVER FIND OUT THAT I'M REALLY MIGUEL AND SPIDER-MAN...
...I'LL NEVER MAKE THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.
HAD TO BREAK MY OFFICE'S VENT SYSTEM TO SNEAK IN.
MAINTENANCE BOTS'LL BE HERE IN...OH, 7.2 SECONDS. GOTTA CHANGE FAST!
BRZZT
HOLY SHOCK-- DOOR BUZZER! MAKE THAT NO SECONDS!
HEY, HOT-SHOT...YOU READY?
FOR?
LUNCH, REMEMBER? AND WHY ARE YOU BREATHING SO HEAVILY?
ANNA, HAVE YOU LOOKED IN THE MIRROR LATELY?
OKAY, LUNCH... I'LL TAKE YOU SOMEPLACE REALLY EXOTIC...

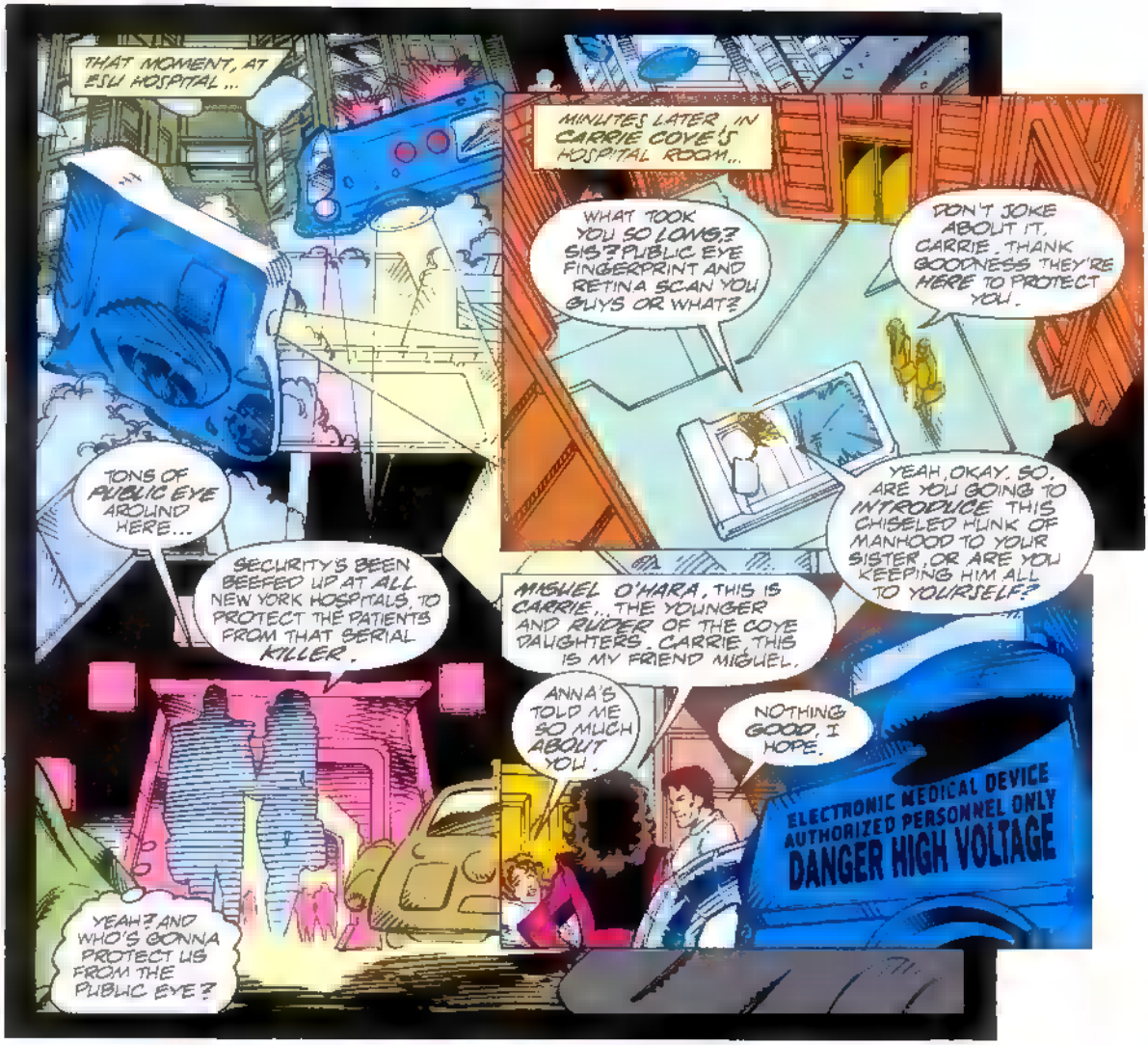
SO, YOU COME HERE OFTEN?
THE ALCHEMAX COMMISSARY? YEAH WELL, IT'S SO EXOTIC I LIKE TO TREAT MYSELF ONCE IN A WHILE.
TABLE FOR TWO?
T-999
TODAY IT'S MY TREAT.
SO...UM, HOW'S CARRIE?
SCARED.
AND YOU?
SCARED. I DON'T WANT TO LOSE MY SISTER.
THE DOCTORS SAY IT'S A RARE GENETIC DEFORMITY, BUT THEY THINK THEY CAN PULL HER THROUGH.
MORE WORRYING IS THAT WEIRD GUY WHO'S BEEN STALKING MANHATTAN HOSPITALS. HE'S KILLED FOUR PATIENTS IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS.
ANYWAY, I'M GOING TO VISIT CARRIE AT ESU HOSPITAL TONIGHT.
HEY, WANT ME TO COME ALONG?
YOU'RE SWEET, MIGUEL, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO--
I WANT TO.
IF CARRIE'S HALF THE EYEFUL YOU ARE, I'VE JUST GOT TO MEET HER.
BESIDES, IT'LL DO HER SOME GOOD TO LAY HER EYES ON A PERFECT GENETIC SPECIMEN LIKE MYSELF, RIGHT?
SPECIMEN IS RIGHT. SOMETIMES I THINK YOU BELONG IN A PETRI DISH, MIGUEL.
AIRPARK LEVEL EIGHT. SIX O'CLOCK.
AND... THANKS.

ELSEWHERE, THAT EVENING...
A FLYING SQUIRREL HAS SKIN FLAPS TO AID IN JUMPS...
WITH CERTAIN WIND CONDITIONS, IT CAN ACTUALLY FLY...
IT ADAPTS... THE SAME WAY I LEARNED TO ADAPT!
ADAPTATION: ONCE, GERALD BERNARDSON WAS QUITE A DIFFERENT MAN.
THEY CALLED ME A BRILLIANT MAN. A DRIVEN MAN.
ON THE FAST TRACK IN GENETIC RESEARCH, OBSESSED WITH DNA VARIATION, MY AREA OF SPECIALTY...THE VERY CATALYST OF EVOLUTION.
THEN, MY DAUGHTER ANTHEA FELL VICTIM TO A MYSTERIOUS ILLNESS. THE DOCTORS WERE STYMIED.
MY WIFE AND I COULD ONLY WATCH...
...AS OUR ONLY CHILD DIED.

MASAI GIRAFFE...
...DEVELOPED EXTRA LONG NECK TO REACH FOOD SUPPLY...
...INCREDIBLY POWERFUL HEART TO PUMP BLOOD TO BRAIN, SPECIAL VALVE SYSTEM IN ARTERIES...
I DEVELOPED A NEW FIXATION, THEN...
...STUDYING A SKIN SAMPLE FROM MY DAUGHTER'S BODY.
CHECKING FOR GENETIC ANOMALIES.
STILL THEY CALLED ME BRILLIANT. DRIVEN.
OBSESSED.
"THEN--A HORRIBLE REVELATION.
A BIZARRE FLAW IN MY OWN DNA, PASSED ALONG TO MY DAUGHTER, CAUSED HER DEATH.
I KNEW GUILT. ANGUISH. THEN... THEY CALLED ME SOMETHING ELSE...
PSYCHOTIC.
INSANE? I WAS DRIVEN TO ANALYZE MY GENETIC FLAW. DRIVEN TO CORRECT IT.
DRIVEN TO THE BRINK OF INSANITY.
IF THIS IS INSANITY... I EMBRACE IT.

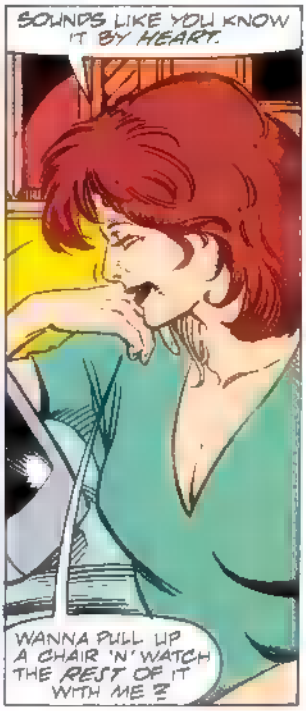
GIBBON...
CUMULATIVE MUTATIONS YIELDED LONGER, STRONGER ARMS FOR MORE EFFICIENT TREE-SWINGING...
MY DIVORCE DIDN'T MATTER. MY LIFE DIDN'T MATTER.
NOTHING MATTERED BUT THE QUEST FOR GENETIC PURITY.
ONCE I BECAME PURE, I COULD REJOIN THE HUMAN RACE. AS IT WAS, I DIDN'T DESERVE TO LIVE.
PERHAPS MY OWN OBSESSION WITH EVOLUTION INFLUENCED THE IRRADIATED SERUM'S MAKEUP...
AND ITS INTERACTION WITH MY ALREADY-FLAWED DNA CAUSED... UNPREDICTABLE RESULTS.

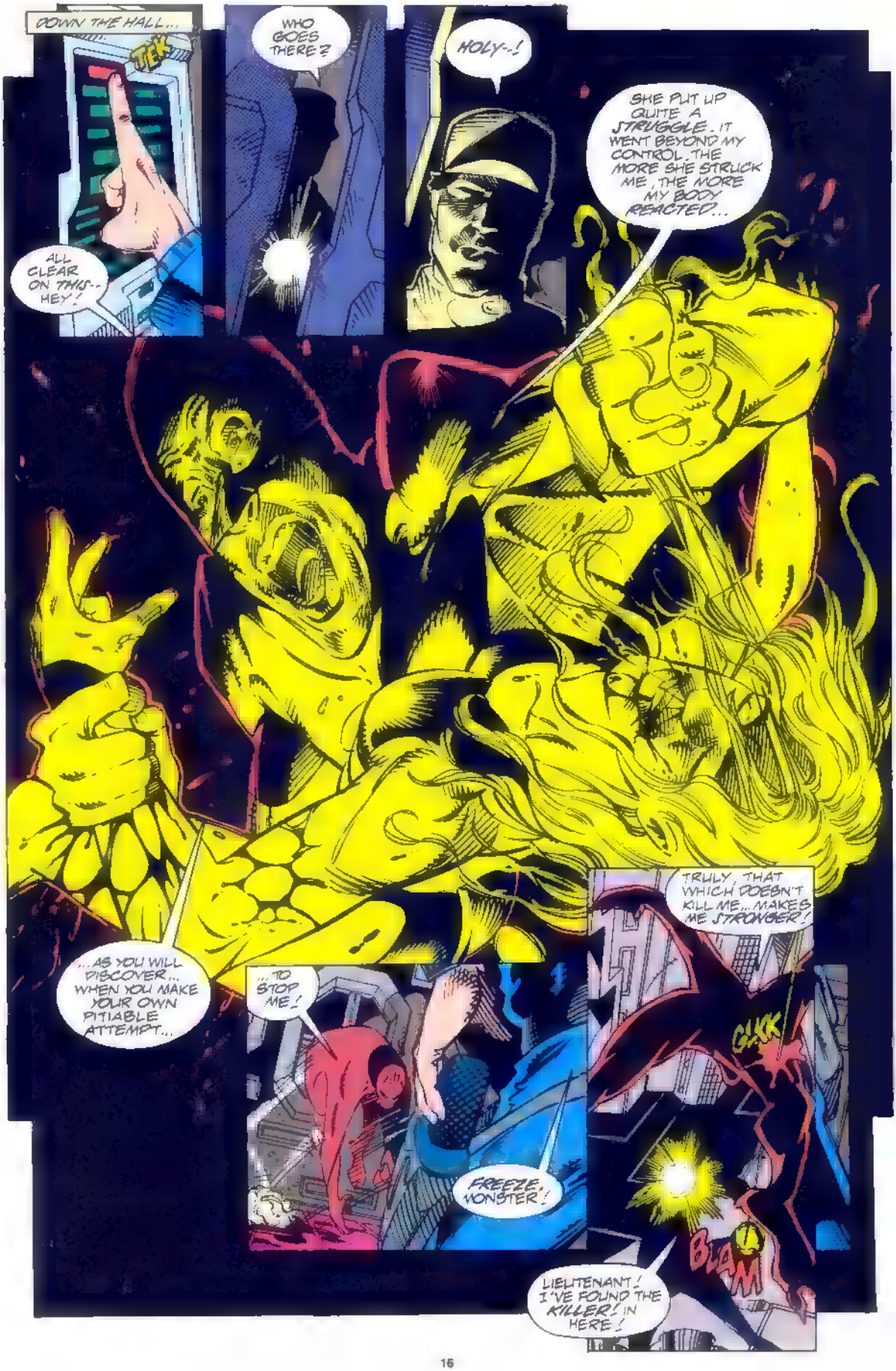
ENOUGH!
MY MIND CAN SCARCELY HOLD ANOTHER ADAPTATION!
AND I DARESAY I ALREADY KNOW MORE OF EVOLUTION THAN ANYONE ELSE ON THE PLANET.
MY SUB-CONSCIOUS HAS AN AMPLE ARRAY OF POSSIBLE HYPER-ADAPTATIONS TO SELECT FROM-- AS THE PAST FEW WEEKS HAVE SHOWN.
I AM READY AGAIN. GERALD BERNARDSON MUST ONCE MORE GUARD THE HUMAN RACE AGAINST IMPURITY...
...AS MUTAGEN!
THE GENE POOL HAS BECOME TAINTED.
IT IS TIME--
--FOR ANOTHER CLEANSING!

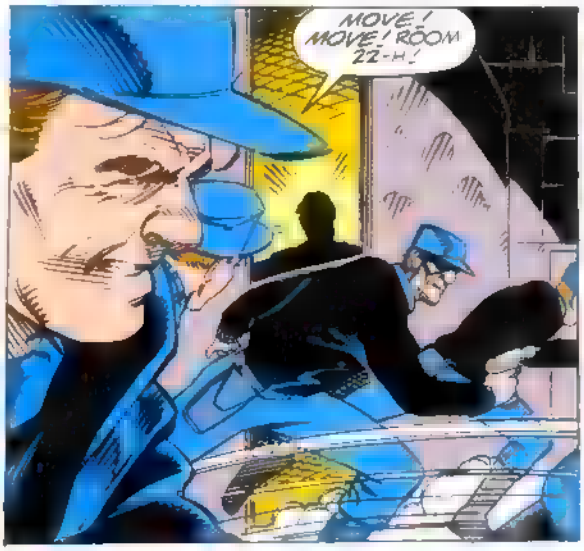

THAT MOMENT, AT ESU HOSPITAL...
MINUTES LATER, IN CARRIE COYE'S HOSPITAL ROOM...
WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG? SIS? PUBLIC EYE FINGERPRINT AND RETINA SCAN YOU GUYS OR WHAT?
DON'T JOKE ABOUT IT, CARRIE. THANK GOODNESS THEY'RE HERE TO PROTECT YOU.
TONS OF PUBLIC EYE AROUND HERE...
SECURITY'S BEEFED UP AT ALL NEW YORK HOSPITALS, TO PROTECT THE PATIENTS FROM THAT SERIAL KILLER.
YEAH, OKAY. SO, ARE YOU GOING TO INTRODUCE THIS CHISELED HUNK OF MANHOOD TO YOUR SISTER, OR ARE YOU KEEPING HIM ALL TO YOURSELF?
MIGUEL O'HARA, THIS IS CARRIE... THE YOUNGER AND RUDER OF THE COYE DAUGHTERS. CARRIE, THIS IS MY FRIEND MIGUEL.
ANNA'S TOLD ME SO MUCH ABOUT YOU.
NOTHING GOOD, I HOPE.
ELECTRONIC MEDICAL DEVICE
AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY
DANGER HIGH VOLTAGE
YEAH? AND WHO'S GONNA PROTECT US FROM THE PUBLIC EYE?

OH, I'VE WHEEDLED EVERY LITTLE DETAIL OUT OF ANNA.
STORIES ABOUT MIGUEL O'HARA, SUPER GENIUS, HELP PASS THE LONG HOURS HERE.
AW, SIS...

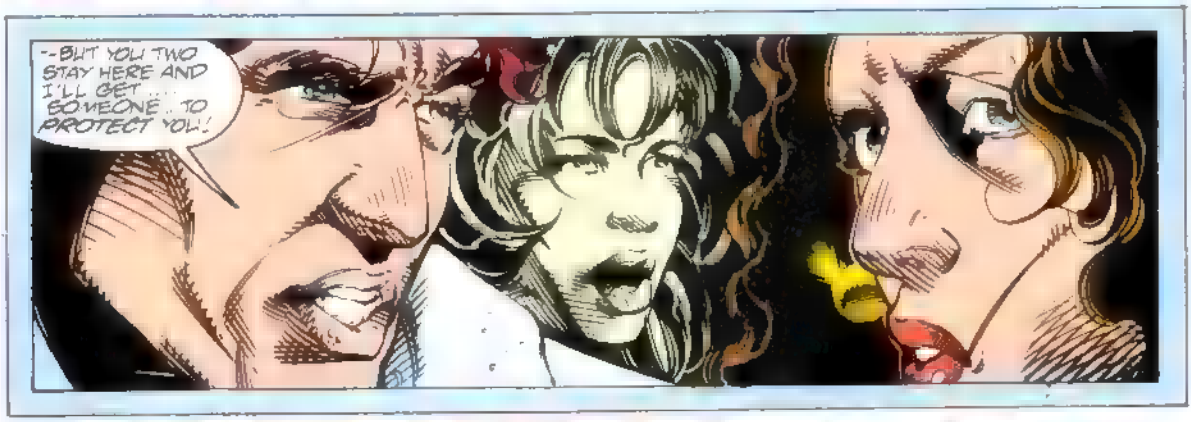
S'ALL RIGHT. HERE, I BROUGHT YOU A HOLO-BOOK SO YOU CAN GET YOUR MIND OFF MY BRILLIANT CAREER. IT'S A TALE OF TWO CITIES.
YOU KNOW, "IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES. IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES..."

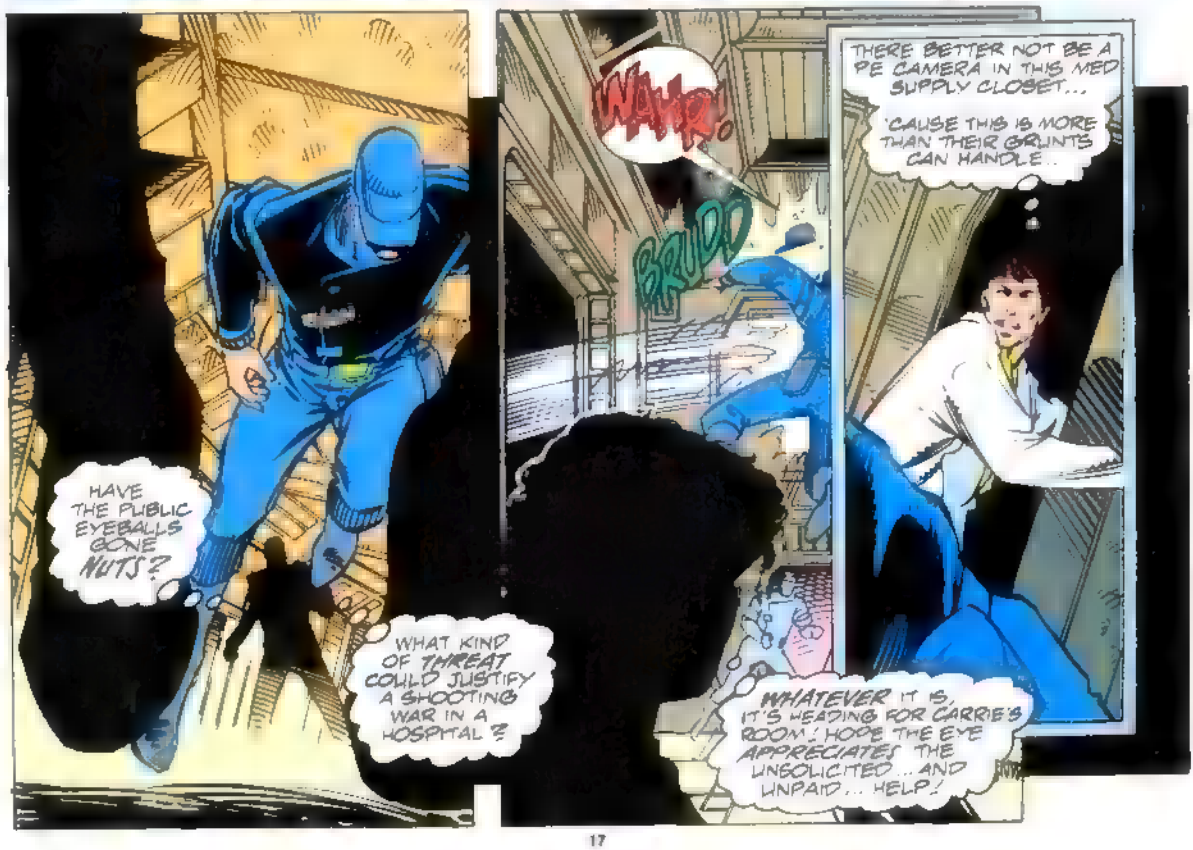

SOUNDS LIKE YOU KNOW IT BY HEART.
WANNA PULL UP A CHAIR 'N' WATCH THE REST OF IT WITH ME?


DOWN THE HALL...
TEK
ALL CLEAR ON THIS-- HEY!
WHO GOES THERE?
HOLY--!
SHE PUT UP QUITE A STRUGGLE. IT WENT BEYOND MY CONTROL. THE MORE SHE STRUCK ME, THE MORE MY BODY REACTED...
...AS YOU WILL DISCOVER... WHEN YOU MAKE YOUR OWN PITIABLE ATTEMPT...
...TO STOP ME!
FREEZE, MONSTER!
TRULY, THAT WHICH DOESN'T KILL ME... MAKES ME STRONGER!
GAK
BLAM
LIEUTENANT! I'VE FOUND THE KILLER! IN HERE!


MOVE! MOVE! ROOM 22-H!

WHAT IS IT?
FREEZE!
AAAAGH!
KUUD
OPEN FIRE! TAKE HIM DOWN!
WATCH HIM WATCH--
HOW DOES HE DO THAT?
WHUK
BLOW
BLOW
THAT SOUNDED LIKE BLASTERS!
MIGUEL, WHAT'S GOING ON?
I DON'T KNOW--


--BUT YOU TWO STAY HERE AND I'LL GET... SOMEONE.. TO PROTECT YOU!

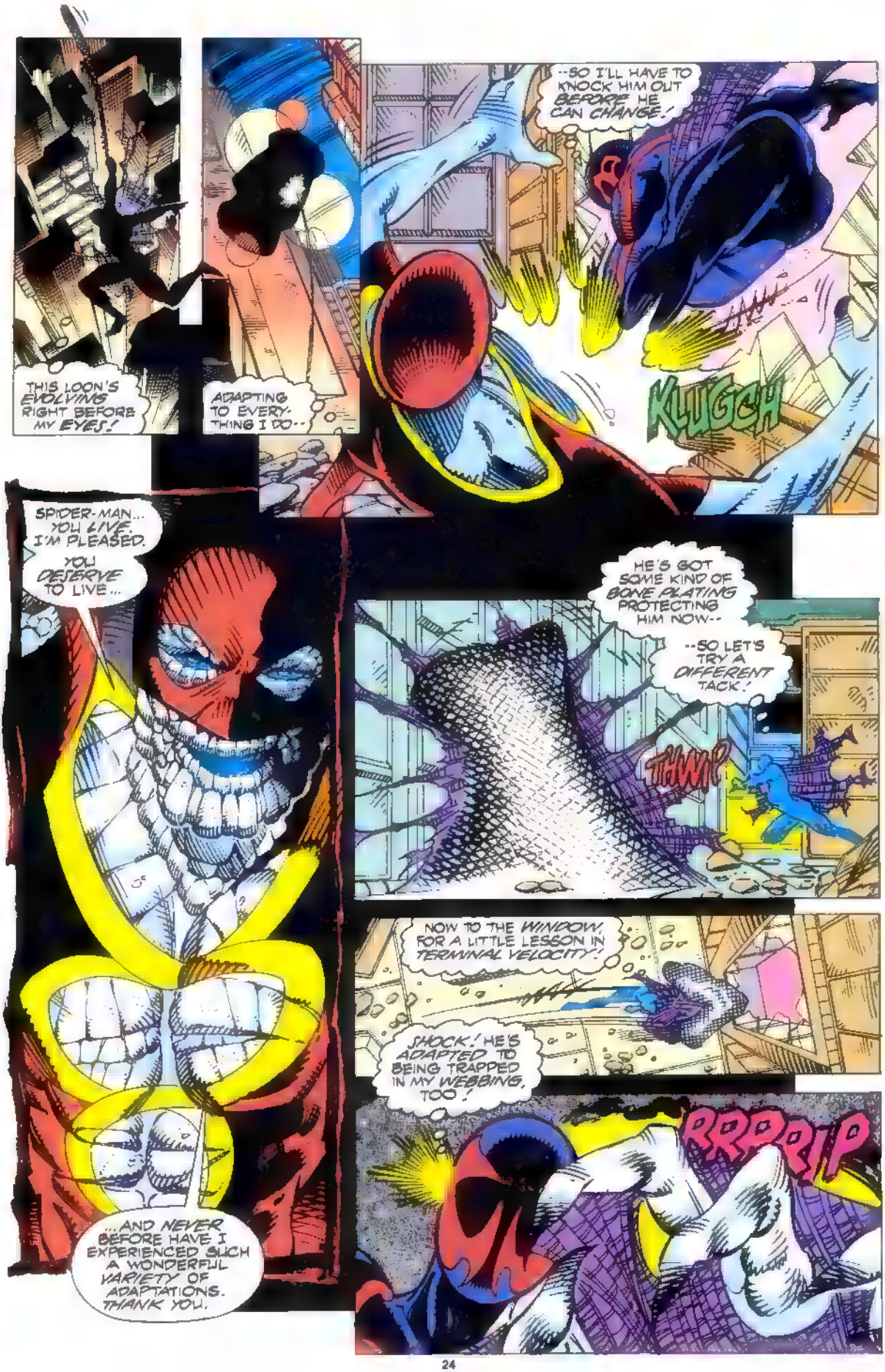

HAVE THE PUBLIC EYEBALLS GONE NUTS?
WHAT KIND OF THREAT COULD JUSTIFY A SHOOTING WAR IN A HOSPITAL?
WAHR!
BRUD
THERE BETTER NOT BE A PE CAMERA IN THIS MED SUPPLY CLOSET...
'CAUSE THIS IS MORE THAN THEIR GRUNTS CAN HANDLE..
WHATEVER IT IS, IT'S HEADING FOR CARRIE'S ROOM! HOPE THE EYE APPRECIATES THE UNSOLICITED .. AND UNPAID.. HELP!

"...A LOT MORE!"
AIGH!
MY BODY'S GROWN IN POWER AND STATURE TEN TIMES OVER!
NO MATTER HOW I AM ATTACKED, MY BODY DEVELOPS JUST THE RIGHT DEFENSE!
A PITY IT'S FADING ALREADY.
"USE IT OR LOSE IT," AS MOTHER NATURE SAYS.
AH, BUT I'LL DEVELOP A NEW POWER... IN A FIGHT WITH ANOTHER VICTIM!
PLEASE EXCUSE THE INTERRUPTION.
I MUST SIMPLY CHECK YOUR MEDICAL CHART, AND...
OH, DEAR.
DEGENERATIVE NERVE DISEASE.
AN... INHERITED DEFORMITY, IS IT NOT? ONE YOU MIGHT... PASS ON TO THE NEXT GENERATION?
I HOPE YOU WILL UNDERSTAND THE REASONS FOR WHAT I AM ABOUT TO DO...
...WHAT I MUST DO...

WHO CARES?
AAAGH!
KRAK
SPIDER-MAN?
THAT SHOULD END IT--
OH, I DON'T BELIEVE THIS!
GUILTY. NOW MOVE!
RUN!
KNOCKED THAT CLOWN CLEAR THROUGH THE WALL.

SPIDER-MAN...
YOUR ATTACK HAS MERELY RESULTED IN ANOTHER OF MY HYPER-ADAPTATIONS... AND A FASCINATING ONE AT THAT.
I DOUBT YOU'LL TRY TO PUNCH ME IN THE JAW AGAIN.
WHO-- WHAT ARE YOU?
CALL ME MUTAGEN.
I HAVE NO QUARREL WITH YOU, SPIDER-MAN.
BUT IF YOU TRY TO STOP MY MISSION YOU'LL PAY!
WHAT KIND OF MISSION INCLUDES KILLING HOSPITAL PATIENTS, MANIAC?
KRUNCH!
ARRGH!

WHY DO YOU FIGHT ME, SPIDER-MAN?
:AAAKKK!
YOU ARE OBVIOUSLY OF SUPERIOR GENETIC STOCK.
WE SHOULD BE ON THE SAME SIDE IN THIS.
THERE'S NO NEED FOR ME TO KILL YOU, BUT YOU MUST NOT IMPEDE THE MISSION!
KWUD
WHAT IS SO ALL-FIRED IMPORTANT ABOUT THIS MISSION OF YOURS?
DON'T YOU SEE? THE HUMAN RACE HAS STOPPED EVOLVING!
IF WE CONTINUE TO NURTURE THOSE WITH INHERITED DEFECTS, WE'LL NEVER IMPROVE THE HUMAN GENE POOL!
THOSE PEOPLE ARE MEANT TO DIE-- AND I INTEND TO SEE THAT THEY DO!
THE VERY SURVIVAL OF HUMANITY IS AT STAKE!
KWUD
AH, PITY...
...SUCH SUPERIOR DNA, SPLATTERED ON THE PAVEMENT.
IT IS... UNFORTUNATE.


THIS LOON'S EVOLVING RIGHT BEFORE MY EYES!
ADAPTING TO EVERY-THING I DO--
--SO I'LL HAVE TO KNOCK HIM OUT BEFORE HE CAN CHANGE!
KLUGCH
SPIDER-MAN... YOU LIVE. I'M PLEASED. YOU DESERVE TO LIVE...
HE'S GOT SOME KIND OF BONE PLATING PROTECTING HIM NOW--
--SO LET'S TRY A DIFFERENT TACK!
THWIP
NOW TO THE WINDOW, FOR A LITTLE LESSON IN TERMINAL VELOCITY!
SHOCK! HE'S ADAPTED TO BEING TRAPPED IN MY WEBBING, TOO!
RRRRIP
...AND NEVER BEFORE HAVE I EXPERIENCED SUCH A WONDERFUL VARIETY OF ADAPTATIONS. THANK YOU.

PUNCHES AREN'T HURTING HIM ANYMORE--
--WEBBING FLOWING OFF HIM NOW--
--EVERYTHING I DO TO HIM SEEMS TO MAKE HIM TOUGHER--
--FASTER :AAGHH!:
BDAP
SO-SPIDER-MAN...?
WHA--? BATTLE CARRIED US BACK TO CARRIE'S ROOM!
FLYING DEBRIS MUST HAVE KNOCKED ANNA OUT.
WHAT AN INTERESTING MEDICAL CHART. LET US SEE. A RARE... GENETIC... ABERRATION.
MUTAGEN'S NOT GOING TO HURT THESE TWO-- EVEN IF IT MEANS I HAVE TO KILL HIM.
GAHH! I'M ALL WET! WE MUST'VE BROKEN THAT PIPE IN THE BRAWL!
FATAL.

NO!
SPIDER-MAN, WHY [redacted] YOU BOTHER? I CAN EASILY DODGE YOUR BLOWS...
YOU NO LONGER POSE A THREAT TO ME.
DON'T YOU SEE? I HAVE ADAPTED TO YOU.
AARRGH

BUT DON'T YOU SEE THE THREAT TO US ALL?
GENETIC DISEASES AND DEFORMITIES THAT SHOULD BE FADING AWAY THROUGH NATURAL SELECTION... ARE THRIVING THANKS TO MODERN MEDICAL SCIENCE!
SHOCKIN' LUNATIC...
ONE CHANCE-- ANNA'S CLEAR OF THE WATER... AND MUTAGEN'S STANDING IN IT...
IF I CAN JUST USE MY WEBBING TO PULL THAT HIGH VOLTAGE DEVICE INTO THAT PUDDLE WITH HIM...
FWIP
WAIT! WHAT ARE YOU--
I... I THINK I KILLED HIM! LORD... FORGIVE...
...ME?
AN INSPIRED EFFORT, SPIDER-MAN.
EVEN I THOUGHT I'D DIE FROM THAT SHOCK.
BUT MY BODY INSULATED ME FROM IT JUST IN TIME.
UNREAL!

NO!

SPIDER-MAN, WHY DO YOU BOTHER? I CAN EASILY DODGE YOUR BLOWS...

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WAIT! WHAT ARE YOU--

FWIP

AAARRGH

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...ME?

AN INSPIRED EFFORT, SPIDER-MAN.

EVEN I THOUGHT I'D DIE FROM THAT SHOCK.

BUT MY BODY INSULATED ME FROM IT JUST IN TIME.

UNREAL!

I'M NO KILLER, MUTAGEN. BUT I CAN'T ALLOW YOU TO DECIDE WHO LIVES AND WHO DIES. YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO DO THAT!
OH, I HAVE THE RIGHT TO DO IT...
...BUT I'M NOT DOING IT RIGHT. YOU'VE SHOWN ME THAT.
THIS METHOD IS... CUMBERSOME. SLOW. INEFFICIENT.
I'LL LEAVE YOU TO ENJOY YOUR VICTORY, SPIDER-MAN...
...WHILE I GO TO PLAN MY OWN!
I'LL BE BACK!
CAN'T LET HIM GET AWAY--
--GUESS I CAN. HE'S ALREADY GONE.
WHOA! ANNA'S COME TO!
THANK GOODNESS! YOU'RE OKAY! ALL ARE!
FOR NOW...
...UNTIL HE RETURNS.
END.

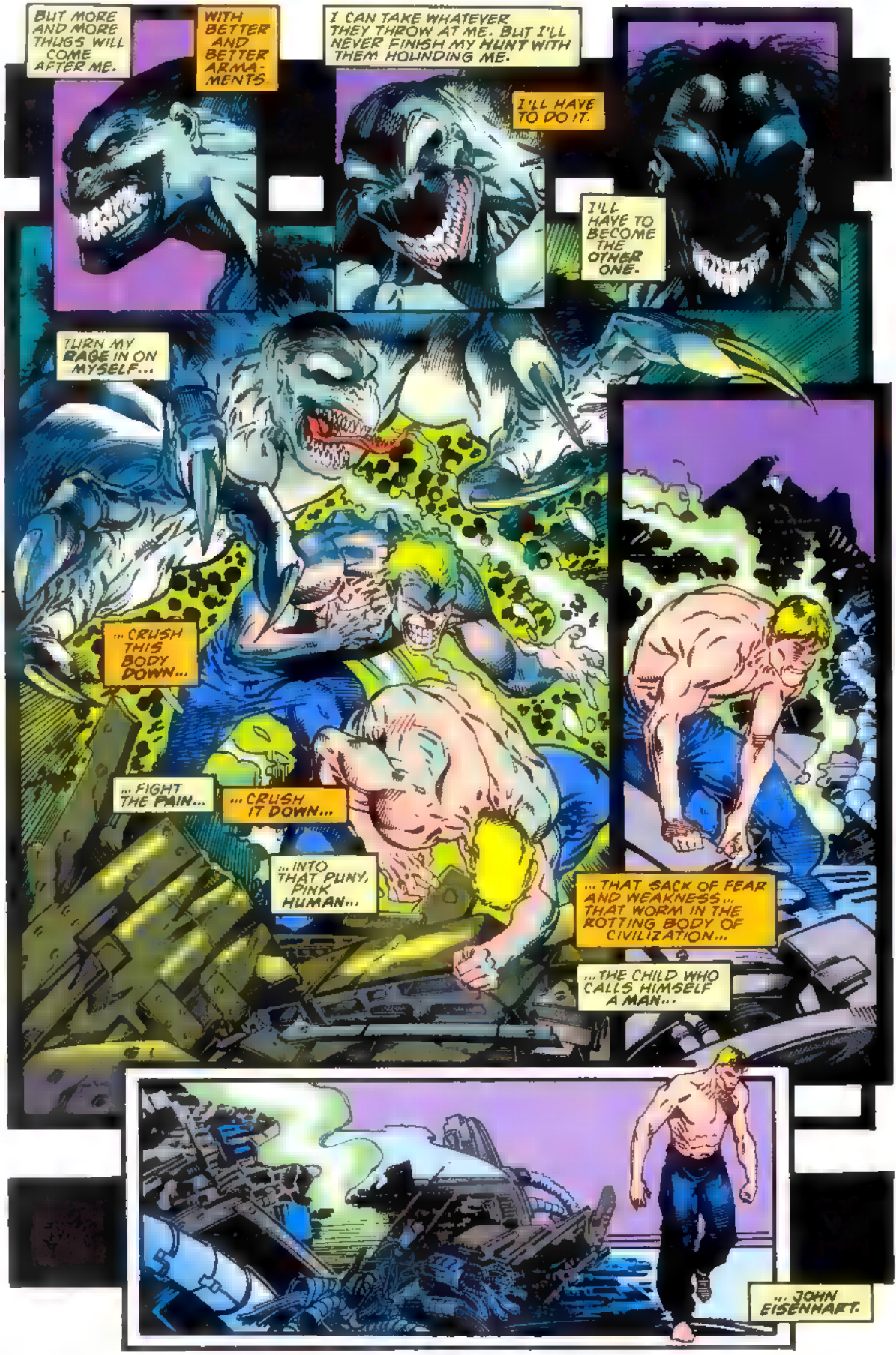
THREE HUNDRED MILES OF NAKED SAND AND ROCK AND ALKALI FLAT. DAYS OF FIRE WITH NO SHADE. NIGHTS LIKE THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON. THEY SAY NO MAN ON FOOT CAN BEAT THE MOJAVE DESERT.
BUT THE MOJAVE NEVER BEAT ME.
THREE HUNDRED MILES IS HOW FAR I'VE WALKED. I'D WALK ANOTHER THOUSAND IF I HAD TO...
...TO FINISH THIS HUNT.
STAN LEE PRESENTS
HULK 2099
GERARD JONES WRITER
DWAYNE TURNER ARTIST
TOM SMITH COLORIST
STARKINGS LETTERER
JOEY CAVALIERI EDITOR
TOM DeFALCO EDITOR IN CHIEF

I KNOW I'M CLOSE WHEN I CAN SMELL THE WIND. EVEN I FEEL THE CHILL -- IT'S A DANGEROUS SMELL.
I KNOW WHAT POWER I HAVE, BUT WHAT I'M GOING UP AGAINST IS ALMOST BEYOND POWER.
IT DOESN'T WIN ITS BATTLES BY FIGHTING.
IT WINS THEM BY CORRUPTING. BY POISONING. BY STRANGLING.
CIVILIZATION.

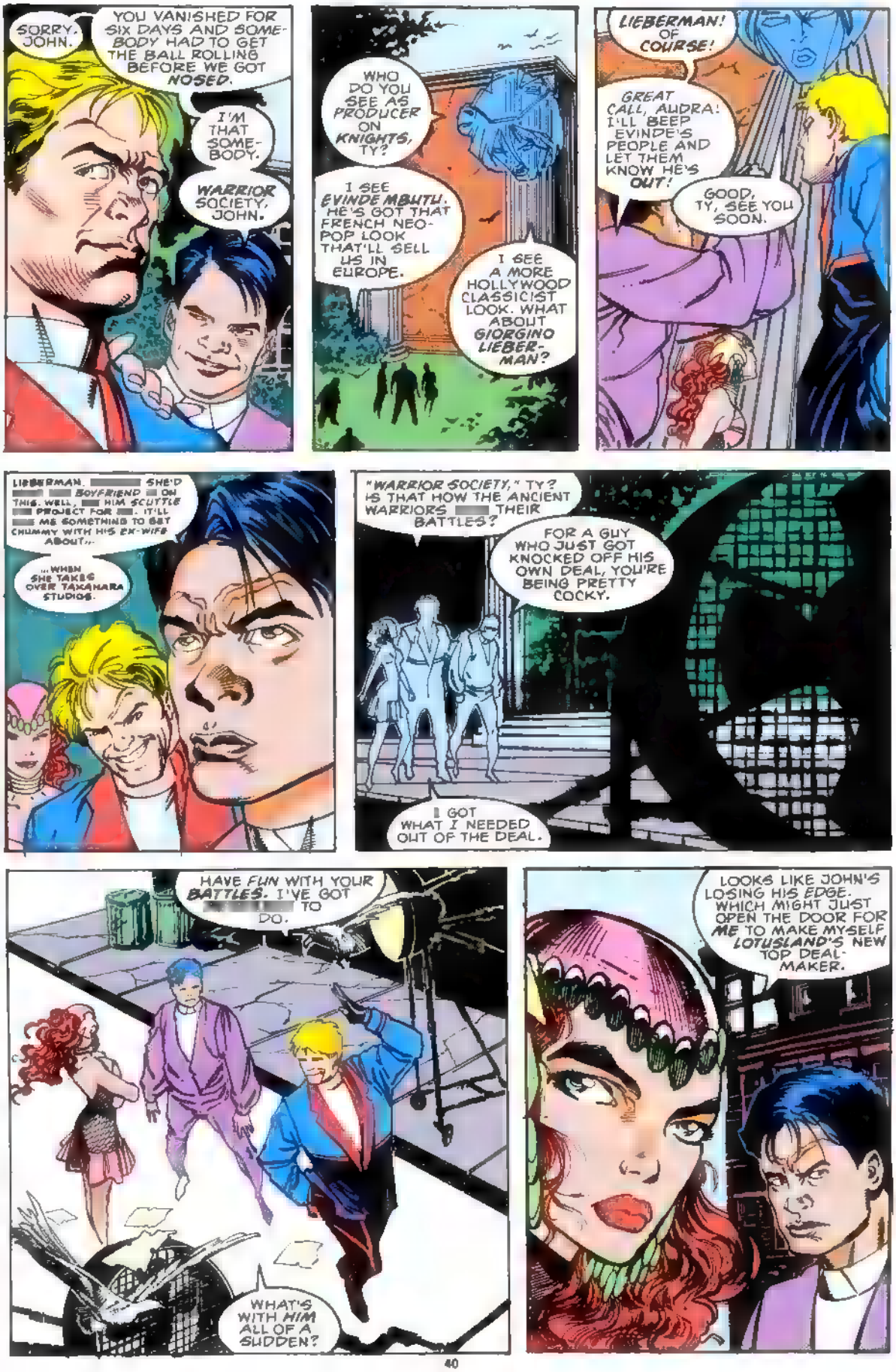
AWOOP! AWOOP! AWOOP!
SPOTTED.
OH LORD... OH, LORD...
I COULD KILL HER BEFORE SHE GETS TO THAT BUTTON.
BUT THAT ISN'T MY WAY.
SWEET DREAMS SECURITY SERVICES
THAT'S HER, HUH? CUTE KID. TOO BAD WE HAVE TO WASTE HER.
...SUBLIMINALS POISON YOUR MUSIC AND SOUL...
SWEET DREAMS
TOO BAD SHE COULDN'T KEEP HER MOUTH SHUT.

INTRUDER AT FIVE-THREE-FIVE-FIVE OLYMPIC, PASADENA! APPEARANCE: "DANGEROUS."
SWEET DREAMS—
SCRAMBLE!
FSHHHH
GETTING A FIX ON TARGET.
TARGET RUNNING.
AND FAST!
Oh GEEZ... WHAT IS THAT THING?
ALREADY...
CIVILIZATION'S THUGS!

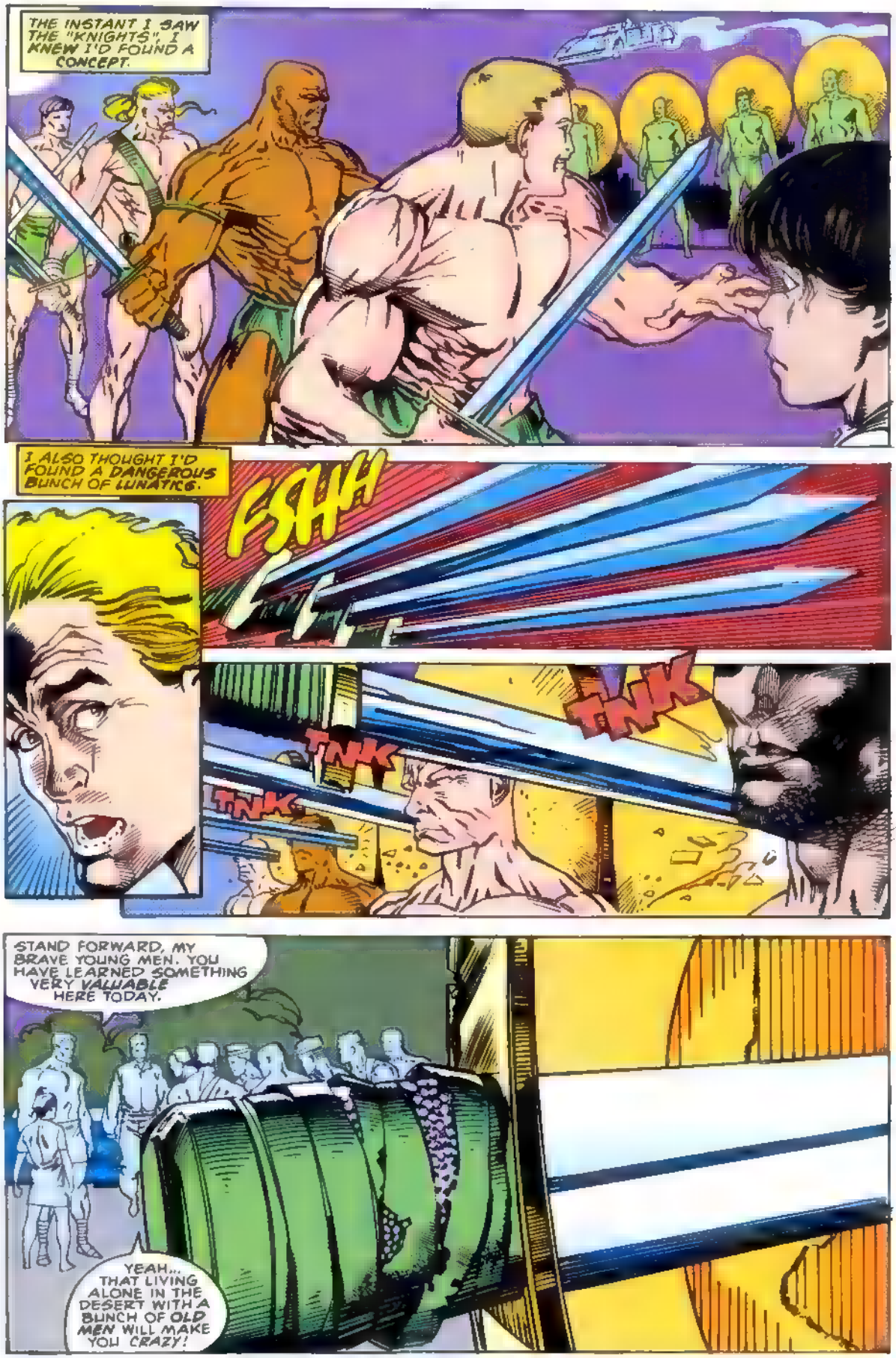
KROOM
SEND BACK-UP!
TRACK THIS TH--
BWOOOM
MY HEART THUNDERS.
I FEEL MY BLOOD EXPLODE THROUGH MY FLESH.
MY INSTINCTS TEAR THROUGH THIS WORLD THAT'S ALWAYS ENSLAVED ME.
I LIKE IT.

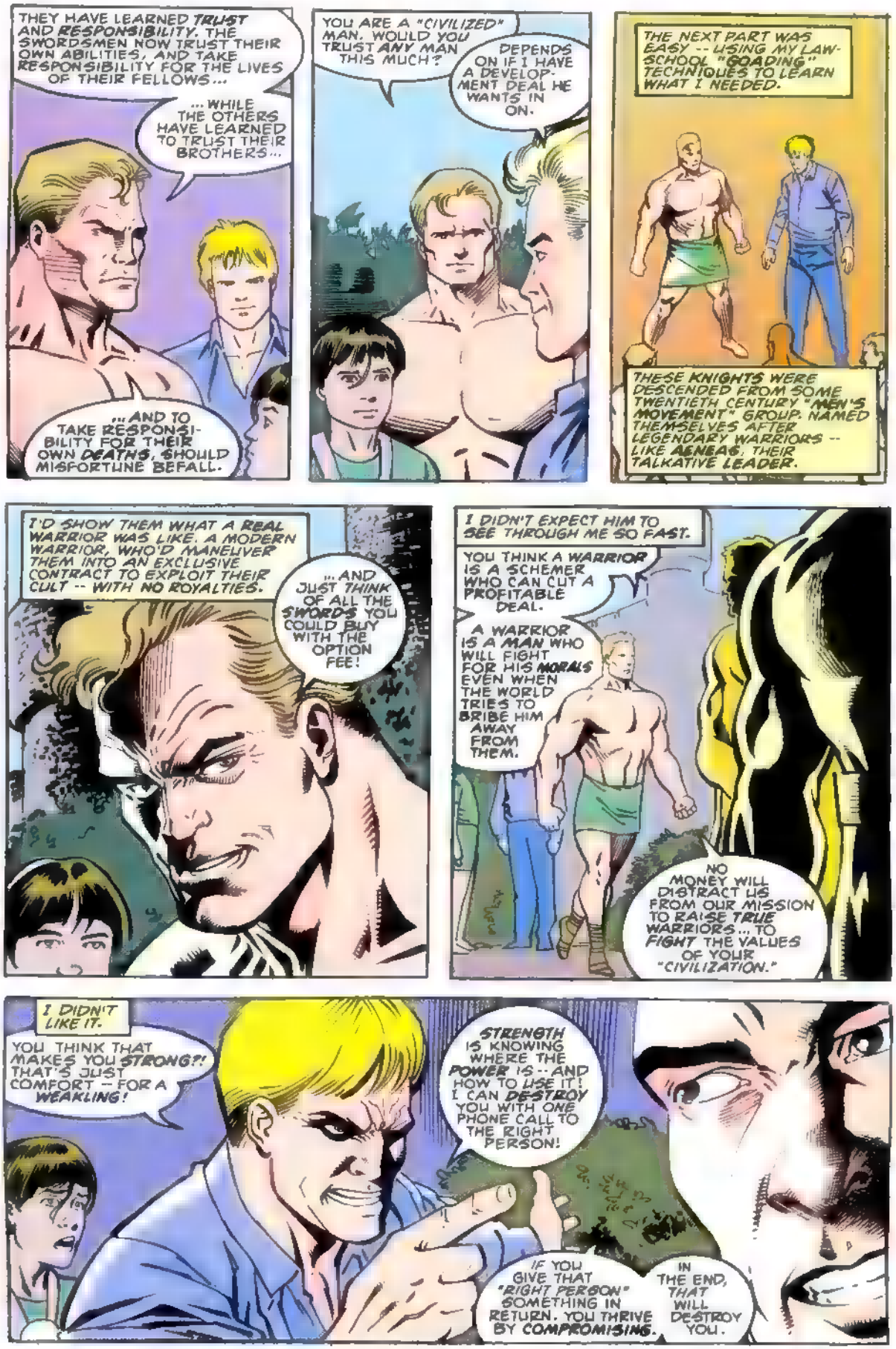

BUT MORE AND MORE THUGS WILL COME AFTER ME.
WITH BETTER AND BETTER ARMAMENTS.
I CAN TAKE WHATEVER THEY THROW AT ME. BUT I'LL NEVER FINISH MY HUNT WITH THEM HOUNDING ME.
I'LL HAVE TO DO IT.
I'LL HAVE TO BECOME THE OTHER ONE.
TURN MY RAGE IN ON MYSELF...
...CRUSH THIS BODY DOWN...
...FIGHT THE PAIN...
...CRUSH IT DOWN...
...INTO THAT PUNY, PINK HUMAN...
...THAT SACK OF FEAR AND WEAKNESS... THAT WORM IN THE ROTTING BODY OF CIVILIZATION...
...THE CHILD WHO CALLS HIMSELF A MAN...
...JOHN EISENHART.

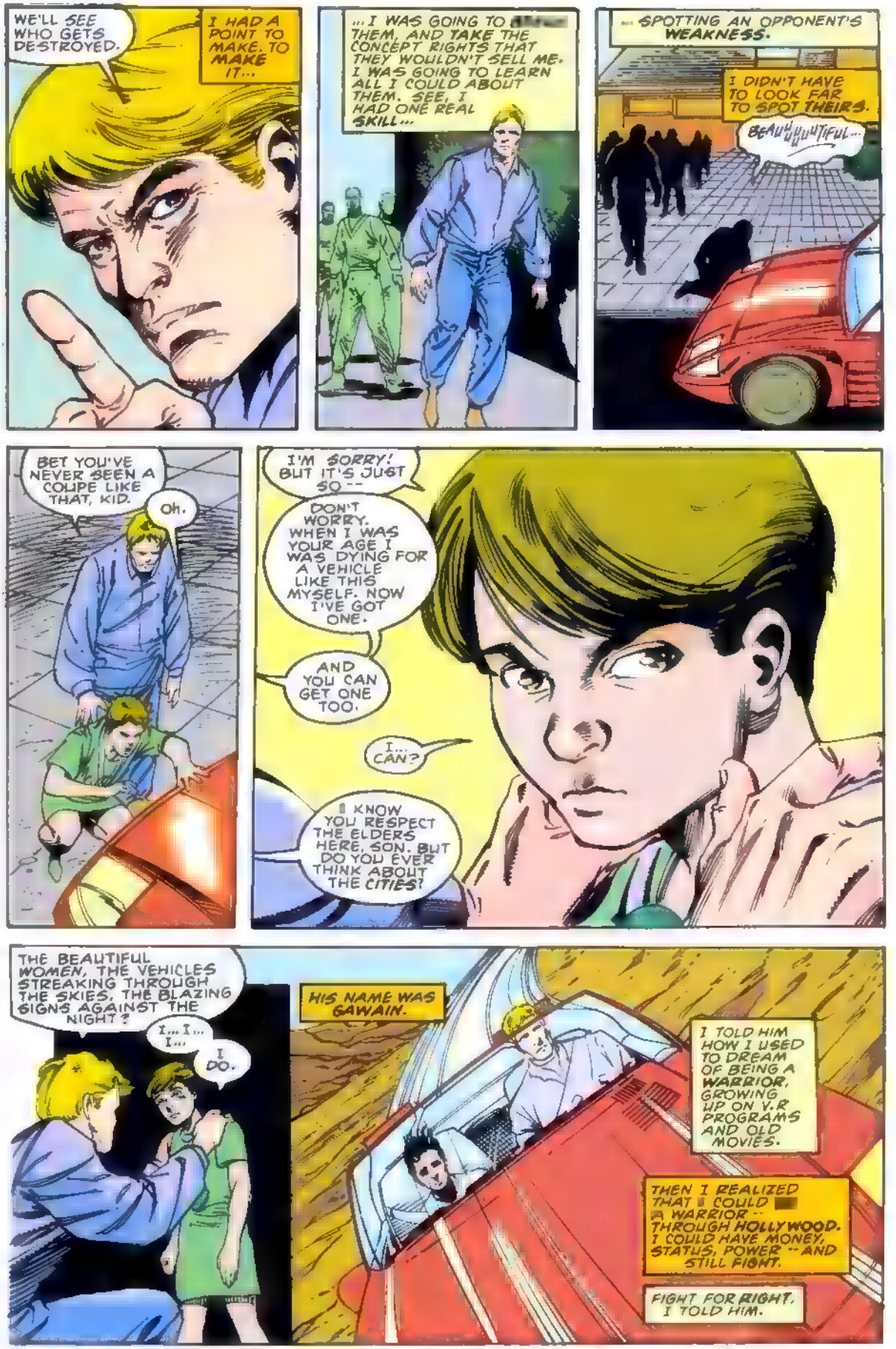
WELL, WELL. JOHN. DECIDED SIX DAYS WAS ENOUGH FOR ONE WEEK-END, Huh?
I WAS WORRIED THAT MAYBE YOU'D GOTTEN HURT OUT THERE IN THE DESERT! I HEARD YOU WERE SO DARING!
I JUST HAD SOME BUSINESS TO FINISH, KEYSHA.
OH-HO...
...SOUNDS TO ME LIKE SOMEBODY JUST WROTE HIS SCRIPT TREATMENT ON "HOW I DID THE KNIGHTS OF THE BANNER DEAL!"
YOU HAVE NO SCRUPLES, JOHN. YOU'RE A TRUE WARRIOR!
WARRIOR...
...YEAH, THAT'S WHAT WE TELL OURSELVES, ISN'T IT, TY? THAT HOLLYWOOD IS A WARRIOR SOCIETY?
NOBODY MAKES IT IN ENTERTAINMENT WITHOUT THE COURAGE AND FEROCITY OF AN ANCIENT WARRIOR.
YOU TAUGHT ME MORE ABOUT THAT THAN ANYONE, JOHN.
GOOD TO SEE YOU BACK, JOHN.
AUDRA!
YOU'VE OUTDONE YOUR-SELF.
[redacted] KIYOSHI ABOUT GETTING A NEW PROJECT TO REPLACE THE [redacted] VELOPMENT [redacted] YOUR PLATE.
REPLACE IT?
BUT THAT PROJECT WAS [redacted] I MADE THAT DEAL!

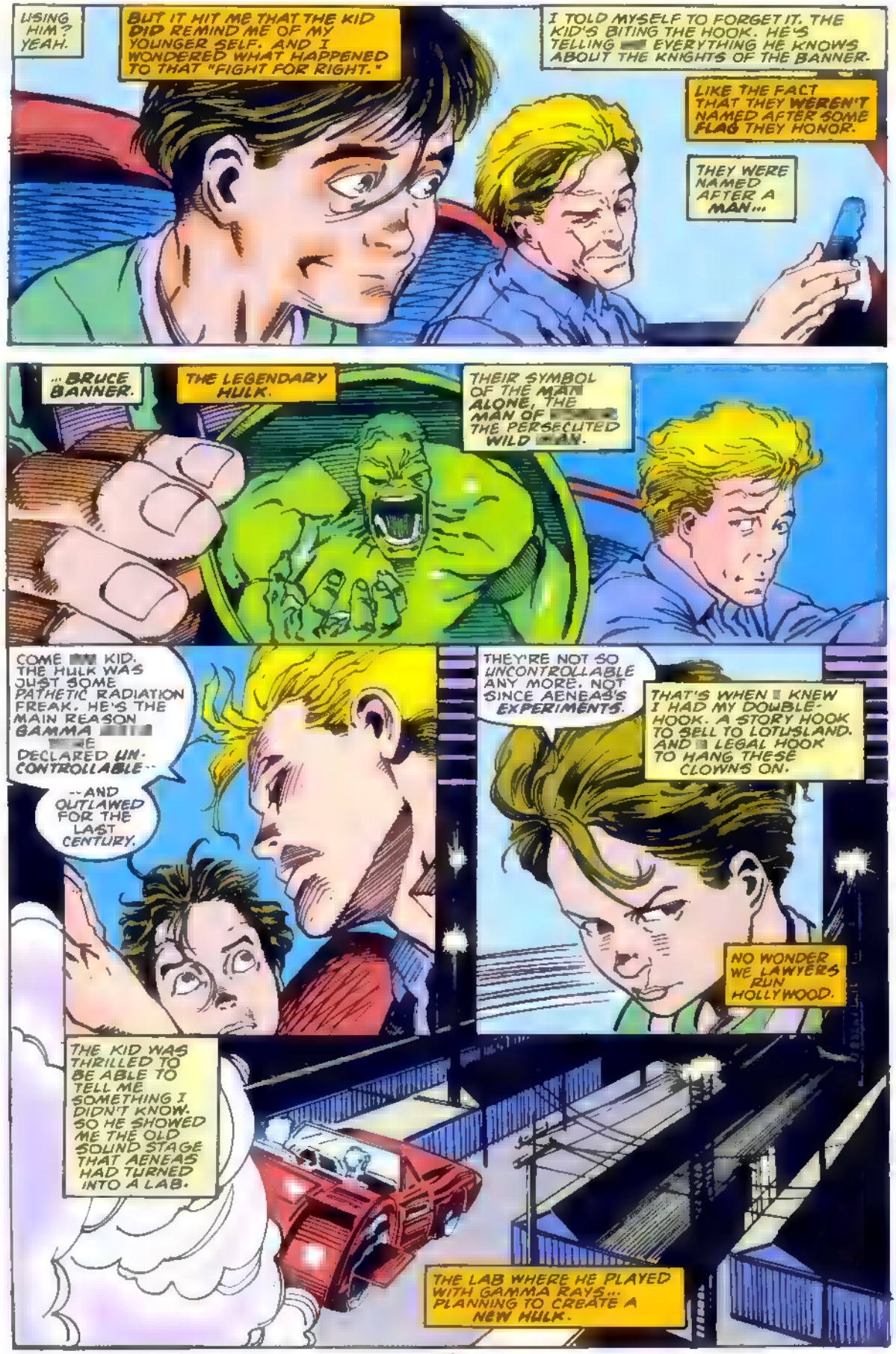

SORRY, JOHN.
YOU VANISHED FOR SIX DAYS AND SOMEBODY HAD TO GET THE BALL ROLLING BEFORE WE GOT NOSED.
I'M THAT SOMEBODY.
WARRIOR SOCIETY, JOHN.
WHO DO YOU SEE AS PRODUCER ON KNIGHTS, TY?
I SEE EVINDE MBUTU. HE'S GOT THAT FRENCH NEO-POP LOOK THAT'LL SELL US IN EUROPE.
I SEE A MORE HOLLYWOOD CLASSICIST LOOK. WHAT ABOUT GIORGINO LIEBERMAN?
LIEBERMAN! OF COURSE!
GREAT CALL, AUDRA! I'LL BEEP EVINDE'S PEOPLE AND LET THEM KNOW HE'S OUT!
GOOD, TY, SEE YOU SOON.
LIEBERMAN. SHE'D BOYFRIEND ON THIS. WELL, HIM SCUTTLE PROJECT FOR . IT'LL ME SOMETHING TO GET CHUMMY WITH HIS EX-WIFE ABOUT...
...WHEN SHE TAKES OVER TAKAHARA STUDIOS.
"WARRIOR SOCIETY," TY? IS THAT HOW THE ANCIENT WARRIORS THEIR BATTLES?
FOR A GUY WHO JUST GOT KNOCKED OFF HIS OWN DEAL, YOU'RE BEING PRETTY COCKY.
I GOT WHAT I NEEDED OUT OF THE DEAL.
HAVE FUN WITH YOUR BATTLES. I'VE GOT TO DO.
WHAT'S WITH HIM ALL OF A SUDDEN?
LOOKS LIKE JOHN'S LOSING HIS EDGE. WHICH MIGHT JUST OPEN THE DOOR FOR ME TO MAKE MYSELF LOTUSLAND'S NEW TOP DEAL-MAKER.

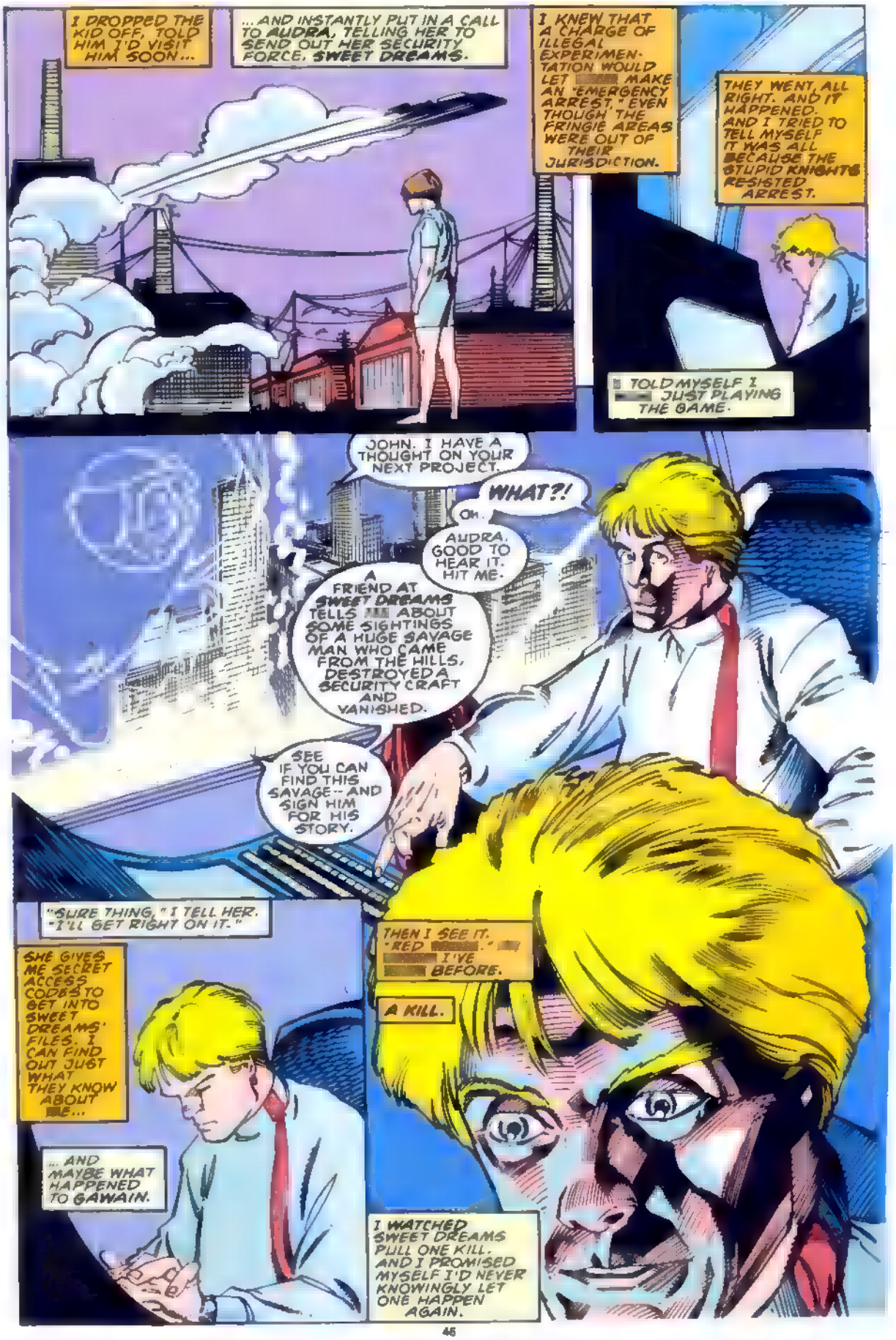
THREE HUNDRED MILES OF WALKING FELT [redacted]. THIS FEELS LIKE A LIE.
BUT IT'S [redacted] I HAVE TO PURSUE THE HUNT NOW. QUIETLY. THROUGH ELECTRONICS.
TRACKING THE NAMES OF ALL THE PLAYERS IN THE [redacted]IGHTS OF [redacted] BANNER "DEAL."
AND THIS IS THE KIND OF ASSAULT I HAVE TO ENDURE. THE STUDIO'S "MENTAL ADJUSTMENT" SPECIALIST.
HELLO, JOHN. A CONCERNED FELLOW EMPLOYEE SAID YOU MIGHT BE SUFFERING SOME POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS AFTER YOUR TROUBLE [redacted] THE DESERT.
I DON'T NEED TO TALK ABOUT ANYTHING, DOCTOR PHIL.
WE SHOULD TALK ABOUT IT.
THAT COULD BE A SIGN OF DENIAL, JOHN.
YOU KNOW THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY DOESN'T LIKE TO SEE A DENIAL DIAGNOSIS ON A RESUME.
MAKE AN APPOINTMENT, JOHN. LET'S TALK.
TALK. ABOUT [redacted] TO PLAY THE BACKSTABBING GAME -- WITHOUT EVER REVEALING THE LIES OF CORPORATE ENTERTAINMENT.
ABOUT HOW TO THRILL THE [redacted] PUBLIC WITH OUR VIRTUAL REALITY SOFTWARE -- WITHOUT EVER QUESTIONING THE SYSTEM.
IT'S THE ONLY GAME CIVILIZATION'S "WARRIORS" CAN PLAY. THE GAME I PLAYED...
-- BEFORE. WHEN ALL I WANTED TO [redacted] WAS THE BEST OF THE "WARRIORS."
I [redacted] A CONCEPT-HUNTER ON THE MAKE. SO I WENT SCOUTING WHERE SO MANY SELLABLE IDEAS HAD COME FROM LATELY...
... THE "FRINGIE" CULTS THAT ARE ALLOWED TO LIVE UNPOLICED IN THE GREAT CALIFORNIA WASTELANDS.
AUDRA! THESE "KNIGHTS OF THE BANNER" I'VE TRACKED DOWN SOUND LIKE THEY'VE GOT THE MAKINGS OF A NEW CULT [redacted] THOR!
WE MAY EVEN BE ABLE TO MARKET THEM AS A NEW RELIGION, LIKE NIRVANA MULTIMEDIA SOLD THE THORIES!
AND GET WHERE THEY LIVE --
-- LONE MOUNTAIN!
IT WAS A STUDIO LOT FOR THE LAST BOOM IN "HEROIC ADVENTURE" MOVIES DECADES AGO -- BEFORE VIRTUAL REALITY WIPED OUT LIVE FILMING...
-- AND CORPORATE SOCIETY DECIDED THE "LONE HERO" ARCHETYPE [redacted] A DANGEROUS ROLE MODEL.

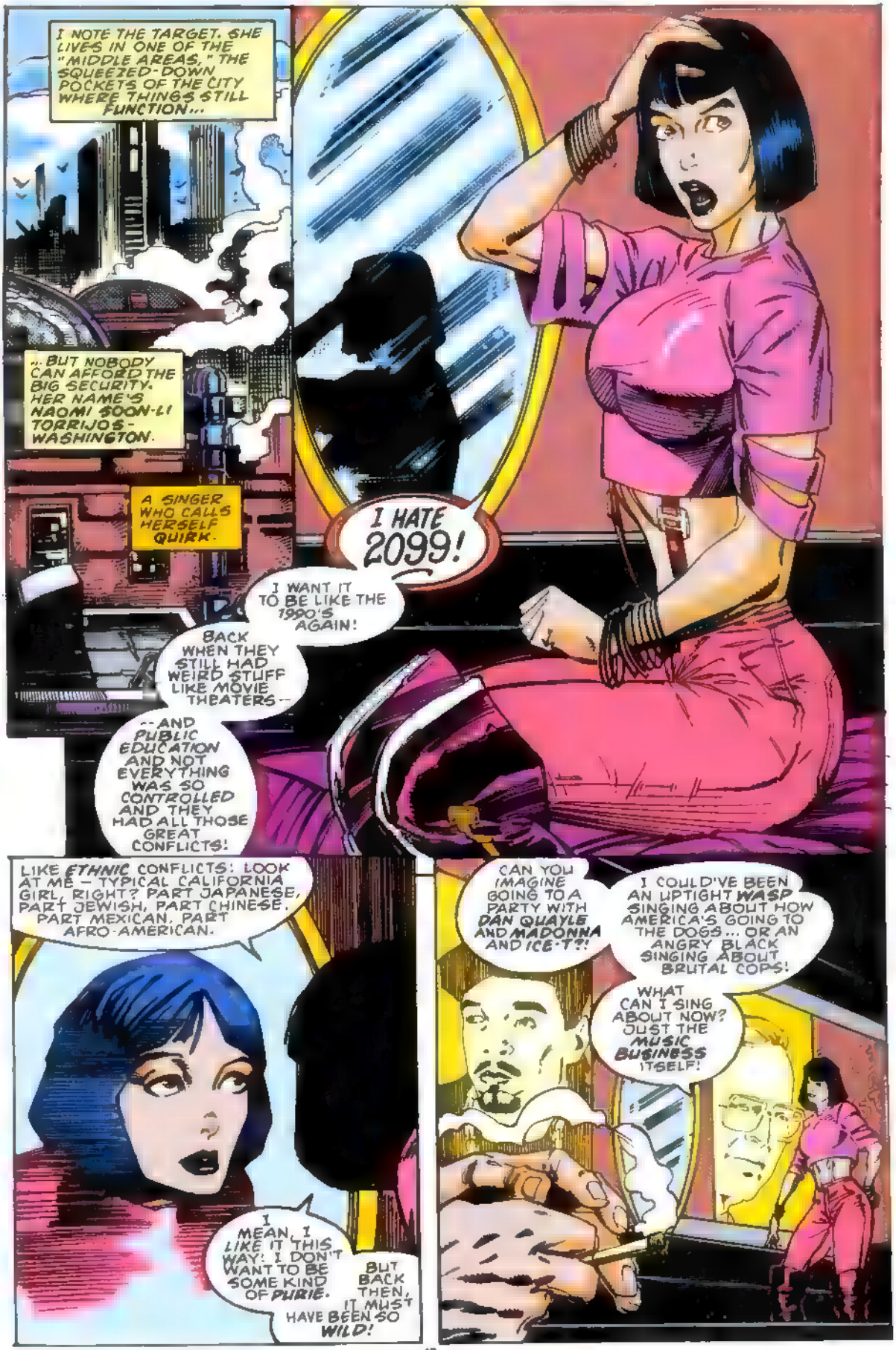

THE INSTANT I SAW THE "KNIGHTS", I KNEW I'D FOUND A CONCEPT.
I ALSO THOUGHT I'D FOUND A DANGEROUS BUNCH OF LUNATICS.
FSHH
TNK
TNK
TNK
STAND FORWARD, MY BRAVE YOUNG MEN. YOU HAVE LEARNED SOMETHING VERY VALUABLE HERE TODAY.
YEAH... THAT LIVING ALONE IN THE DESERT WITH A BUNCH OF OLD MEN WILL MAKE YOU CRAZY!


THEY HAVE LEARNED TRUST AND RESPONSIBILITY. THE SWORDSMEN NOW TRUST THEIR OWN ABILITIES, AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE LIVES OF THEIR FELLOWS...
...WHILE THE OTHERS HAVE LEARNED TO TRUST THEIR BROTHERS...
...AND TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN DEATHS, SHOULD MISFORTUNE BEFALL.
YOU ARE A "CIVILIZED" MAN. WOULD YOU TRUST ANY MAN THIS MUCH?
DEPENDS ON IF I HAVE A DEVELOPMENT DEAL HE WANTS IN ON.
THE NEXT PART WAS EASY -- USING MY LAW-SCHOOL "GOADING" TECHNIQUES TO LEARN WHAT I NEEDED.
THESE KNIGHTS WERE DESCENDED FROM SOME TWENTIETH CENTURY "MEN'S MOVEMENT" GROUP. NAMED THEMSELVES AFTER LEGENDARY WARRIORS -- LIKE AENEAS, THEIR TALKATIVE LEADER.
I'D SHOW THEM WHAT A REAL WARRIOR WAS LIKE. A MODERN WARRIOR, WHO'D MANEUVER THEM INTO AN EXCLUSIVE CONTRACT TO EXPLOIT THEIR CULT -- WITH NO ROYALTIES.
...AND JUST THINK OF ALL THE SWORDS YOU COULD BUY WITH THE OPTION FEE!
I DIDN'T EXPECT HIM TO SEE THROUGH ME SO FAST.
YOU THINK A WARRIOR IS A SCHEMER WHO CAN CUT A PROFITABLE DEAL.
A WARRIOR IS A MAN WHO WILL FIGHT FOR HIS MORALS EVEN WHEN THE WORLD TRIES TO BRIBE HIM AWAY FROM THEM.
NO MONEY WILL DISTRACT US FROM OUR MISSION TO RAISE TRUE WARRIORS... TO FIGHT THE VALUES OF YOUR "CIVILIZATION."
I DIDN'T LIKE IT.
YOU THINK THAT MAKES YOU STRONG?! THAT'S JUST COMFORT -- FOR A WEAKLING!
STRENGTH IS KNOWING WHERE THE POWER IS -- AND HOW TO USE IT! I CAN DESTROY YOU WITH ONE PHONE CALL TO THE RIGHT PERSON!
IF YOU GIVE THAT "RIGHT PERSON" SOMETHING IN RETURN, YOU THRIVE BY COMPROMISING.
IN THE END, THAT WILL DESTROY YOU.


WE'LL SEE WHO GETS DESTROYED.
I HAD A POINT TO MAKE. TO MAKE IT...
...I WAS GOING TO [redacted] THEM, AND TAKE THE CONCEPT RIGHTS THAT THEY WOULDN'T SELL ME. I WAS GOING TO LEARN ALL I COULD ABOUT THEM. SEE, I HAD ONE REAL SKILL...
...SPOTTING AN OPPONENT'S WEAKNESS.
I DIDN'T HAVE TO LOOK FAR TO SPOT THEIRS.
BEAUUUUTIFUL...
BET YOU'VE NEVER SEEN A COUPE LIKE THAT, KID.
Oh.
I'M SORRY! BUT IT'S JUST SO --
DON'T WORRY. WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE I WAS DYING FOR A VEHICLE LIKE THIS MYSELF. NOW I'VE GOT ONE.
AND YOU CAN GET ONE TOO.
I... CAN?
I KNOW YOU RESPECT THE ELDERS HERE, SON. BUT DO YOU EVER THINK ABOUT THE CITIES?
THE BEAUTIFUL WOMEN, THE VEHICLES STREAKING THROUGH THE SKIES, THE BLAZING SIGNS AGAINST THE NIGHT?
I... I... I...
I DO.
HIS NAME WAS GAWAIN.
I TOLD HIM HOW I USED TO DREAM OF BEING A WARRIOR, GROWING UP ON V.R PROGRAMS AND OLD MOVIES.
THEN I REALIZED THAT I COULD [redacted] A WARRIOR -- THROUGH HOLLYWOOD. I COULD HAVE MONEY, STATUS, POWER -- AND STILL FIGHT.
FIGHT FOR RIGHT, I TOLD HIM.


USING HIM? YEAH.
BUT IT HIT ME THAT THE KID DID REMIND ME OF MY YOUNGER SELF. AND I WONDERED WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT "FIGHT FOR RIGHT."
I TOLD MYSELF TO FORGET IT. THE KID'S BITING THE HOOK. HE'S TELLING [redacted] EVERYTHING HE KNOWS ABOUT THE KNIGHTS OF THE BANNER.
LIKE THE FACT THAT THEY WEREN'T NAMED AFTER SOME FLAG THEY HONOR.
THEY WERE NAMED AFTER A MAN...
...BRUCE BANNER.
THE LEGENDARY HULK.
THEIR SYMBOL OF THE MAN ALONE, THE MAN OF [redacted] THE PERSECUTED WILD [redacted]AN.
COME [redacted] KID. THE HULK WAS JUST SOME PATHETIC RADIATION FREAK. HE'S THE MAIN REASON GAMMA [redacted] DECLARED UNCONTROLLABLE...
--AND OUTLAWED FOR THE LAST CENTURY.
THEY'RE NOT SO UNCONTROLLABLE ANY MORE. NOT SINCE AENEAS'S EXPERIMENTS.
THAT'S WHEN I KNEW I HAD MY DOUBLE-HOOK. A STORY HOOK TO SELL TO LOTUSLAND. AND A LEGAL HOOK TO HANG THESE CLOWNS ON.
NO WONDER WE LAWYERS RUN HOLLYWOOD.
THE KID WAS THRILLED TO BE ABLE TO TELL ME SOMETHING I DIDN'T KNOW. SO HE SHOWED ME THE OLD SOUND STAGE THAT AENEAS HAD TURNED INTO A LAB.
THE LAB WHERE HE PLAYED WITH GAMMA RAYS... PLANNING TO CREATE A NEW HULK.


I DROPPED THE KID OFF, TOLD HIM I'D VISIT HIM SOON...
...AND INSTANTLY PUT IN A CALL TO AUDRA, TELLING HER TO SEND OUT HER SECURITY FORCE, SWEET DREAMS.
I KNEW THAT A CHARGE OF ILLEGAL EXPERIMENTATION WOULD LET [redacted] MAKE AN "EMERGENCY ARREST," EVEN THOUGH THE FRINGIE AREAS WERE OUT OF THEIR JURISDICTION.
THEY WENT. ALL RIGHT. AND IT HAPPENED. AND I TRIED TO TELL MYSELF IT WAS ALL BECAUSE THE STUPID KNIGHTS RESISTED ARREST.
I TOLD MYSELF I [redacted] JUST PLAYING THE GAME.
JOHN. I HAVE A THOUGHT ON YOUR NEXT PROJECT.
WHAT?!
OH.
AUDRA. GOOD TO HEAR IT. HIT ME.
A FRIEND AT SWEET DREAMS TELLS [redacted] ABOUT SOME SIGHTINGS OF A HUGE SAVAGE MAN WHO CAME FROM THE HILLS, DESTROYED A SECURITY CRAFT AND VANISHED.
SEE IF YOU CAN FIND THIS SAVAGE -- AND SIGN HIM FOR HIS STORY.
"SURE THING," I TELL HER. "I'LL GET RIGHT ON IT."
SHE GIVES ME SECRET ACCESS CODES TO GET INTO SWEET DREAMS' FILES. I CAN FIND OUT JUST WHAT THEY KNOW ABOUT [redacted]...
... AND MAYBE WHAT HAPPENED TO GAWAIN.
THEN I SEE IT. "RED [redacted]." [redacted] I'VE [redacted] BEFORE.
A KILL.
I WATCHED SWEET DREAMS PULL ONE KILL. AND I PROMISED MYSELF I'D NEVER KNOWINGLY LET ONE HAPPEN AGAIN.


I NOTE THE TARGET. SHE LIVES IN ONE OF THE "MIDDLE AREAS," THE SQUEEZED-DOWN POCKETS OF THE CITY WHERE THINGS STILL FUNCTION...
...BUT NOBODY CAN AFFORD THE BIG SECURITY. HER NAME'S NAOMI SOON-LI TORRIJOS-WASHINGTON.
A SINGER WHO CALLS HERSELF QUIRK.
I HATE 2099!
I WANT IT TO BE LIKE THE 1990'S AGAIN!
BACK WHEN THEY STILL HAD WEIRD STUFF LIKE MOVIE THEATERS--
--AND PUBLIC EDUCATION AND NOT EVERYTHING WAS SO CONTROLLED AND THEY HAD ALL THOSE GREAT CONFLICTS!
LIKE ETHNIC CONFLICTS: LOOK AT ME -- TYPICAL CALIFORNIA GIRL, RIGHT? PART JAPANESE, PART JEWISH, PART CHINESE, PART MEXICAN, PART AFRO-AMERICAN.
I MEAN, I LIKE IT THIS WAY: I DON'T WANT TO BE SOME KIND OF PURIE.
BUT BACK THEN, IT MUST HAVE BEEN SO WILD!
CAN YOU IMAGINE GOING TO A PARTY WITH DAN QUAYLE AND MADONNA AND ICE-T?!
I COULD'VE BEEN AN UPTIGHT WASP SINGING ABOUT HOW AMERICA'S GOING TO THE DOGS... OR AN ANGRY BLACK SINGING ABOUT BRUTAL COPS!
WHAT CAN I SING ABOUT NOW? JUST THE MUSIC BUSINESS ITSELF!

I STILL SAY YOU SHOULD'VE STAYED AWAY FROM THAT, QUIRK.
SOMEBODY'S GOTTA SAY IT, ABDUL! EVERYBODY THINKS STUFF MUSIC IS THE ONLY KIND THAT TELLS THE TRUTH, THAT GOES AGAINST THE CORPORATE MESSAGE --
--AND THEN YOU TELL [redacted] THE PRODUCERS ARE SLIPPING SUBLIMINALS INTO STUFF SONGS!
HEY, IT'S BUSINESS. I RECORDED "PUSH BACK" BECAUSE I WANTED TO SUCCEED IN THIS TOWN.
IF THEY WANT TO SLIDE IN SUBLIMINALS SAYING: "THIS IS JUST A SONG, DON'T TAKE IT SERIOUSLY, YOU'RE HAPPIER AS YOU ARE..."
...THAT'S HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED.
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU. I RESPECTED YOU WHEN WE STARTED DATING! "ABDUL T'CHAKA ROSENTHAL, THE SINGING POET OF TRUTH!"
NOW I'M THE ONLY ONE TELLING THE TRUTH -- I'M THE ONE WITH THE SONG ABOUT SUBLIMINALS!
I TELL YOU, YOU'RE GOING TO GET TROUBLE, PRESSING THAT SONG ON YOUR OWN!
I'VE GOT NOTHING TO LOSE. WHAT CAN THEY DO TO ME?
THEY COULD --
CHOOM

NO!
VROOOSH
SWEET DREAMS.
CHOOM
CHOOM
HEY! I DIDN'T DO NOTHING TO YOU!
I'M JUST TRYING TO TELL THE --

CHOOM CHOOM
OH JEEZ
OH JEEZ
GOTTA GET--
NO, GIRL.
NOWHERE TO GET.
NOW JUST LET US GET THIS OVER W--
WHUNCH
HUH?

BAROOOM
GET--
--OUT!
CHOOM CHOOM CHOOM
YAARRGH

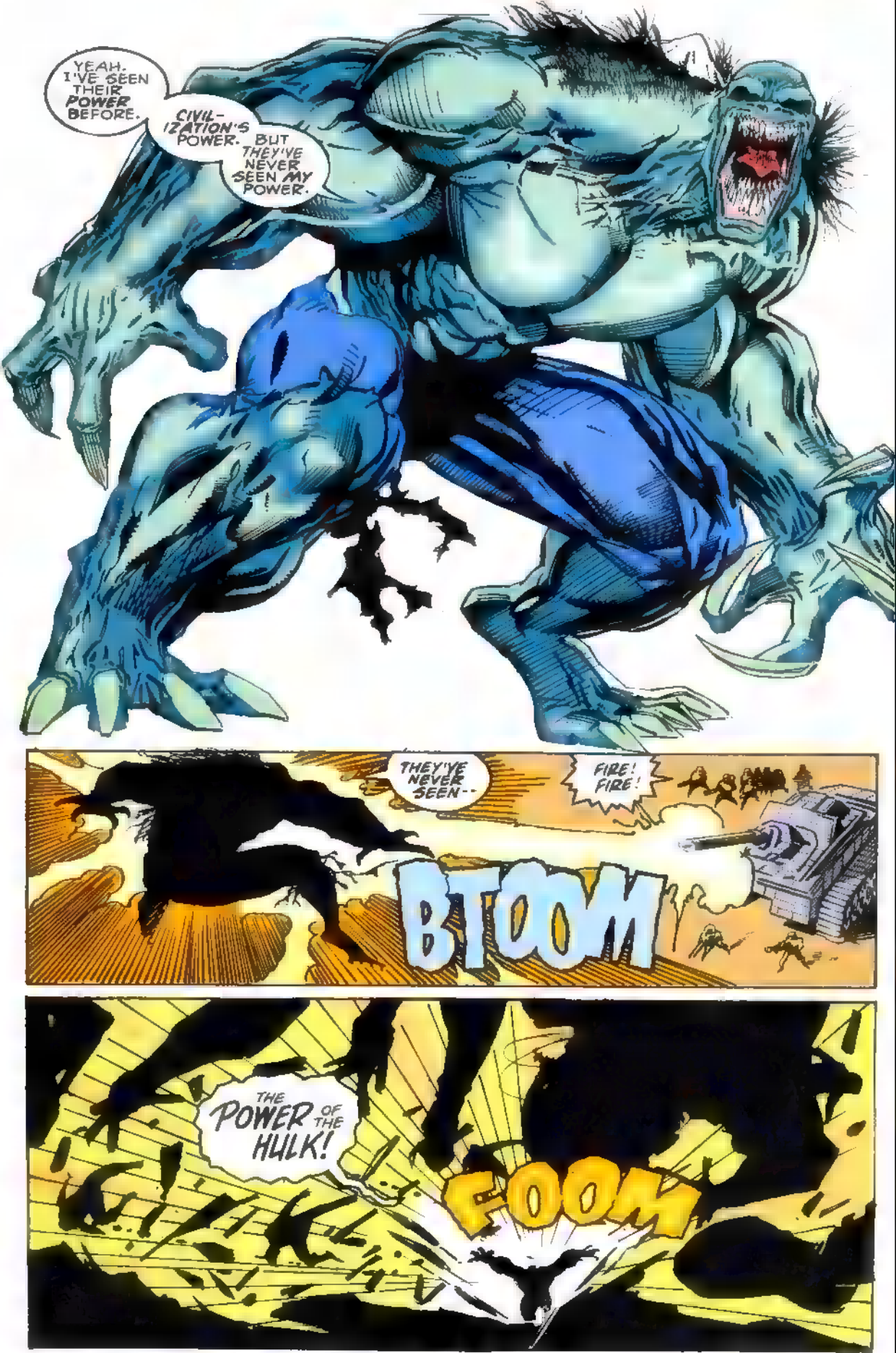
SHIP
STOP RIGHT THERE! YOU'RE SURROUNDED!
C-CAN YOU TAKE THESE GUYS?
HEY. CAN YOU TAKE 'EM?
CAN YOU?
I'VE SEEN THEIR POWER BEFORE.
THE KNIGHTS STOOD FIRM WHILE SWEET DREAMS MOVED IN ON THEM.
I FOUND MYSELF HOPING THE ARREST WENT EASILY -- FOR THE KNIGHTS' SAKE.

WHAT WE DO HERE IS RIGHT.
WE WILL NOT TOSS OURSELVES INTO YOUR CORRUPT AND TANGLED JUDICIAL SYSTEM TO ATTEMPT TO PROVE IT TO YOU.
WE ARE [redacted] WE ARE MEN. [redacted]E WILL FIGHT FOR OUR BELIEFS.
AND, IF WE MUST, WE WILL DIE FOR THOSE BELIEFS -- LIKE MEN.
YOU'LL DIE, ALL RIGHT --
--LIKE IDIOTS!
CHOOM
AENEAS!
AENEAS.
NO!
SUDDENLY, I WAS PUNCHING THE ACCELERATOR, SLICING IN BETWEEN SO THEY COULDN'T FIRE.
INSTEAD, THEY JUST FIRED ON ME.

"MORON," I TOLD MYSELF.
"JUST...
"PLAY...
"...THE GAME."
JUST PLAY THE GAME.
CHOOM CHOOM
WAAA!!
YOU!
YOU DID THIS!
YOU TRICKED ME SO YOU COULD KILL US!
I'LL SHOW YOU! I'LL SHOW YOU!
I'LL KILL YOU ALL!
GAWAIN! WAIT!

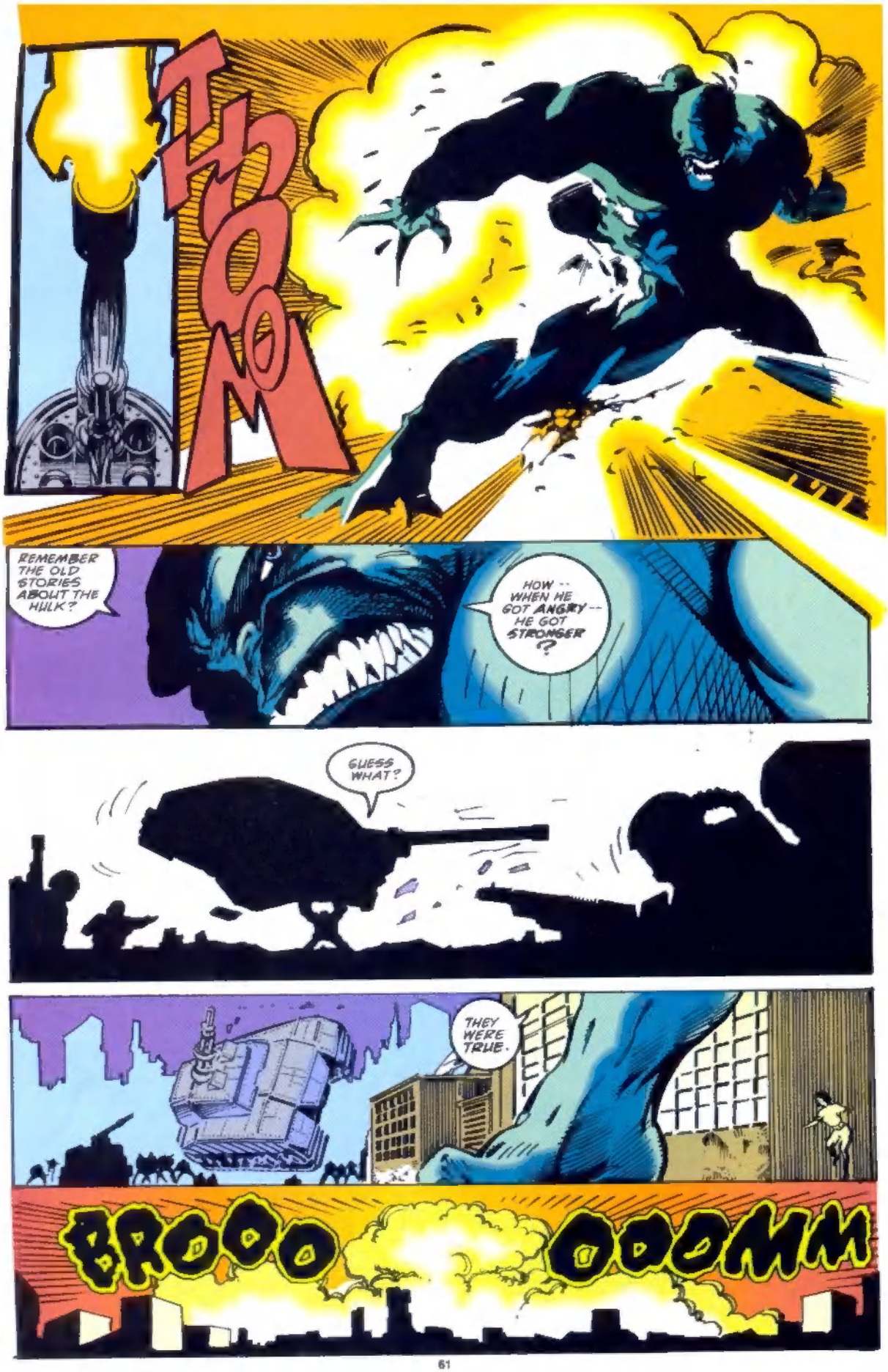
I'M GOING TO TURN IT UP TOO HIGH! I'M GOING TO MAKE THE GAMMA RAYS EXPLODE!
GAWAIN -- NO!
I'M GOING TO BLOW US ALL TO VALHALLA -!!-
DON'T BE INSANE!
LET ME TURN IT UP! LET ME TURN IT UP!
KLIK
LET ME --
Oh...
...NO...

BOOM
AAAAAA!
I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I LAY THERE.
WHEN I CRAWLED TO THE STREET, SWEET DREAMS WAS GONE, THE KNIGHTS WERE GONE... GAWAIN WAS GONE.
LATER I LEARNED THAT GAWAIN WAS THE ONLY KNIGHT WHO DIDN'T SHOW UP ON THE LIST OF THE DEAD.
LATER, I WOULD BEGIN MY HUNT.
I WOULD TRY TO TRACK GAWAIN AND HIS CAPTORS.
BUT NOT THEN.
THEN I ONLY KNEW WHAT I'D DONE.
I ONLY KNEW WHAT CIVILIZATION HAD MADE ME.
AND IT MADE ME ANGRY.
IT MADE ME VERY ANGRY.
IT MADE ME WHAT THE KNIGHTS HAD TRIED TO CREATE.


YEAH. I'VE SEEN THEIR POWER BEFORE.
CIVILIZATION'S POWER.
BUT THEY'VE NEVER SEEN MY POWER.
THEY'VE NEVER SEEN--
FIRE! FIRE!
BTOOM
THE POWER OF THE HULK!
FOOM

GYAARH!
SHRRAKK
NNH!
SHOCK TROOPS--
SHUMP
--HIT!!
CHOK
YOUR GADGETS... ARE GETTING BETTER... ALL THE TIME.
LET'S HEAR IT --
WTAM
--FOR TECHNOLOGY!

CH CH CH
CHOOM
OKAY-- LET'S END THIS!
CH CH
CHOOM
FORGET REGULATIONS--
--LET'S JUST END THIS!
YEAH
LET'S!
FIRE ARTILLERY!


THOOM
REMEMBER THE OLD STORIES ABOUT THE HULK?
HOW -- WHEN HE GOT ANGRY -- HE GOT STRONGER ?
GUESS WHAT?
THEY WERE TRUE.
BROOO OOOMM

FZ-HP-OM
OH... LORD.
WHAT ARE YOU?
WHAT ARE YOU?
I'M A MAN.
THE END